

PROLOGUE

Daily Prophet Special Edition

Harry Potter is Going Underground!

Just one week after the humiliating defeat of the Dark Lord and his Death Eater followers, Harry Potter has said goodbye, perhaps for the last time. Rumors of his apparent dislike of the Ministry as well as many ancient traditional pureblood practices may have had some truth behind them. He is well known to value his privacy above all else and freely admits to having much contempt for the media in general. We here at the Daily Prophet appreciate his fairness with respect to our publication, particularly considering he is our majority owner. He has reportedly turned down several offers to play professional quidditch, as well as offers from several Ministry departments. His life has been almost entirely devoted to fighting the Dark Lord and his Death Eaters ever since he graduated from Hogwarts last year. Perhaps he just needs a well deserved vacation. Or perhaps he really has disappeared forever. He only sent this missive, and it is certainly open to speculation as to what it means:

Dear Wizarding World,

Toodles.

Love,
Harry.

P.S. – I'll be watching you!

We here at the Daily Prophet are hesitant to draw too many conclusions about what can be inferred from this, but it seems we may have heard the last of Harry Potter for a long time and perhaps ever. We thank him for the services he has done for all the Wizarding World and wish him the best. We certainly feel better knowing he will be watching out for us.

The response to the article spurred on several manhunts to locate the powerful young man. Nothing became of any of the leads. After several months of fruitless searches the Ministry and most other people gave up looking. One group who never gave up is the Order of the Phoenix. Its leader, Albus Dumbledore, did little to help them, as he simply was respecting Harry's wishes. Hermione Granger dearly missed her best friend. She and Auror Nymphadora Tonks were the most persistent members trying to follow any leads they had. After nine months, over two dozen useless trips around the world, and no concrete information at all, they were still trying strong. Harry's finances were still his, and the goblins wouldn't give out any information, particularly on one of their most affluent clients. The Order knew he had far more properties than they could have imagined, and far too few life experiences in his childhood. They were undeterred, even though they knew Harry was somewhere most likely laughing at them. So far, there had been numerous completely unfounded Quibbler articles, including a weekly update, but not a single confirmed sighting or legitimate photograph. In truth, the only thing of substance they had was the letter he had written them the day he disappeared.

Dear Order of the Phoenix

I'm taking a permanent vacation. It's going to start with a worldwide tour. See all the things I wanted to see, and go all the places I wanted to go. I doubt I will ever be back. Feel free to look for me, but don't waste too much time. I doubt you'll have much luck. I can be a pretty tricky guy when I want to be. I'm not angry or disappointed in anyone in particular but Harry Potter has no place in normal society. So take pleasure in knowing I'm somewhere better off. Harry Potter can be called on, if there is a real threat and the public morale needs him. But I honestly do not foresee a need for Harry Potter for a long time if ever. I've had to be the most disgusting poster boy and hero for too many years. It is time for me to take advantage of a conclusion to a prophecy and start to live instead of just surviving.

Sincerely,
'Clark Kent'

Author's Note: This idea was inspired some by Daily Prophet Reporting's The Season (News Articles to tell the story), Rorschach's Blot's Make A Wish (Harry going out to live and having a blast doing it), and epholge's Catch Me If U Can (Harry staying a step ahead of friends and having a little fun with them). Harry will be ridiculously skilled and/or powerful. This is just a fun light-hearted post-Hogwarts story. Posting the first chapter right after this prologue, and will explain some timeline things in an author's note at the end of that one.

CHAPTER ONE

"Hermione! Hermione! I swear I just saw Harry this afternoon!" a hyperactive auror yelled out.

"Where was he?" an overeager muggleborn witch responded.

"I was watching the telly. It was a golf tournament in Maui. He was walking around carrying the sign that calls for 'Quiet Please'. When he walked past the camera he winked!"

The muggleborn shook her head and rolled her eyes. "Tonks. That's horrible. This is getting ridiculous. Last time he was refereeing a Wimbledon semifinal match. What else was there? He was an autopsied murder victim on some crime show? He had an infomercial selling magic tricks? And believe me, no matter how much you swear on what you saw: Harry was not in the movie The Princess Bride! Harry probably jinxed your telly, because none of these things make any sense at all."

"This is a brand new telly I bought! I thought I was going crazy when I saw a black line judge with a lightning bolt scar winking at the camera."

"Maybe he jinxed this one too. Wait." Hermione paused and held up her hand to stop Tonks. "He was black, Tonks?"

The auror looked sheepish. "Oh. Umm. He-he. Did I neglect to mention that last time?"

Hermione adopted a placating exasperated attitude. "And you thought he was Harry."

Tonks looked away and nodded.

"Do I need to mention the fallacy in your thinking there?"

"Oh shush Hermione. You know how frustrating it is. You've got a secrecy oath on you too. I've seen you get flustered and silent."

Hermione's face grimaced. "I think almost all of us have one. I swear if I ever find that cheeky little bugger I'm going to kill him dead. Then I'll find a way to bring him back just to kill him even dead. He's been playing us all. I think Professor Flamel knows more than he lets on too. I could see his eyes twinkling like sparklers he was having so much fun in his last official Order meeting."

"Good luck getting any answers out of him. Considering his age, and lack of a Sorcerer's Stone, he could have died and we'd never know."

"You were never in his classes Tonks. I cannot imagine anything finishing the man off."

"Well he did teach for two consecutive years breaking the DADA curse. Although Dumbledore told me his replacement has already turned in his resignation." Tonks said shaking her head. "Has anyone heard from Flamel since the war ended?"

Hermione looked thoughtful. "Not as far as I know. Albus would be the most likely one. And I think he enjoys our Harry hunting too much to actually help us."

Tonks looked a bit miffed. "Yeah I know. I wonder if he's contacted Remus too, as I would have thought Moony would be as eager to find him as we are."

"You know it's possible, but the more I think about it, the more I wonder if perhaps they are under stricter oaths than us and are actually unable to help us track him down."

"Any luck on your online searches? Or as Ron calls it, the innie-net on the komptooter."

Hermione shook her head the reminder of her muggle clueless friend. "Yeah, I found another sighting that's pretty much guaranteed to have been him. But it was over a week old and most likely a dead-end."

"So what did the smarmy bastard do this time?"

“Apparently, at halftime at a muggle professional basketball game over in the states, Detroit I think it was. There was a quote ‘lucky fan that got one chance at a half-court shot for million dollars.’ Apparently, this ‘Ron Weasley’” Hermione said the name with a disbelieving roll of her eyes, “made the shot to win the money. The crowd cheered like crazy. He grabbed a couple more basketballs, took two more and made both of those shots too, then had to be escorted from the court after he took his shirt off and was swinging it around with enthusiasm to a raucous crowd. I swear Harry must be having the time of his life.”

“Yeah that sounds like him alright.”

“If there was any question, I also found the next day an orphanage in Detroit received an anonymous donation of a million dollars. The US Government Tax officers are apparently no longer actively hunting ‘Mr. Weasley’ for tax evasion.”

“Oh that would be fun if they caught him. Not that they could ever hold him, or catch him, but still. He’s going to make a mistake and we’re going to get him when he does. Cheekiness has a limit and he passed his about 9 months ago.”

“I haven’t looked at today’s Quibbler. Shall we see where they’re placing him this time?”

The Quibbler presents: This week in Harry Potter!

Harry Potter, the Roadie?

By: Luis Spurini Photo by: Abel Smurck

Harry Potter was spotted three times this week, at three separate concert events. The band, The Monkees, comprised of four Wizards who have been hugely successful in the muggle world have been on a reunion tour. A young man in a bandana can be seen in the background setting up equipment in the picture to the right. Several anonymous sources assure us that the Roadie in question is Harry Potter.

Tonks mused out loud. “That one seems a bit more likely than some of them lately. You know it’s really infuriating not knowing how many of these ‘spottings’ are real. From what little we know, they all could be.”

"You're not giving up on me, are you Tonks?" Hermione inquired.

Tonks shook her head. "Oh no. That would mean he wins. And this game ain't over yet. No way."

"I still can't believe we haven't caught him." Hermione explained in frustration.

"You don't think maybe we're obsessing a bit much here? I mean Ginny had the biggest crush in the world on him, and it's beginning to seem like it's just you and me still active in the hunt."

"Ron would be with us, but he's been real busy at work lately. He's officially an Assistant Coach too now and apparently doesn't have the time he used to."

"Yeah that's great for him. I'm just an auror, and well there are barely any criminals worth catching these days. It's Harry's fault I got nothing better to do than look for him."

"I heard Draco made a scene at a bar the other day. Maybe he's got some nefarious plans." Hermione suggested with a shrug.

Tonks shook her head with a smile. "Naw I got the story on that one. It sounded hilarious though. Something tells me if Draco were up to something Harry would have stopped him."

"Hilarious? What happened?"

Tonks got a wicked smile and recounted the alleged scene.

Draco walked into his favorite bar, the Dapper Dragon. There was a man at the bar, with his back towards him, apparently attracting a lot of attention. There were four young attractive witches surrounding him. A fifth one approached him, and Draco tried to subtly listen in. The man's back was still to Draco, and he couldn't tell what he was saying, but the witch was giggling an awful lot. Draco decided he should find out more about this guy.

He walked over to him and said clearly, "You know you make it harder on the rest of us, when you keep hoarding all the beautiful witches to yourself."

The man turned around to look at the intruding voice, and Draco's expressionless mask fell in a brief moment of surprise. The man looked just like him. He was even sneering like Draco practiced!

This evil twin spoke up. "The names Git. Poncy Git."

Draco raised an eyebrow. "How do you do Mr. Git. I am Draco Malfoy." Draco responded with an air of superiority.

The evil twin's eyes widened. "Malfoy! I know that name! You may be a handsome bloke, but you can't change the fact that you're nothing but a filthy pureblood."

Draco eyes widened in shock. He uttered a quite intelligent. "What?"

"You're going to die like all the rest of you muggle-hating scum! The Light Lord Potter will rise again and cleanse your purities!"

Draco began stammering in more confusion. "What...wait..." He furrowed his brow and tilted his head looking closer at his evil twin. He quietly whispered out in a question, "Scarhead?"

"You'll be one of the first to go, you pureblood!" Then the evil twin smiled, reached out and tweaked Draco's nose, and disappeared without a sound.

Hermione was cracking up. "Oh man I bet Draco was pissed at that. The Light Lord Potter." Hermione said shaking her head with a smile. "Honestly."

"Yeah, it was after that Draco made a bit of a scene. Accidental magic like an ickle child. The soundless apparition makes me wonder if that was Harry. Though I'm sure Draco's got himself more than a couple enemies."

“Well tomorrow is his birthday. Something tells me he’s going to be seen or do something ridiculous tomorrow. How about lunch in Diagon Alley? Me and Ginny were planning on it, but we could all get together and work on some conspiracy theories.”

“Sounds good. I’ve got to report to the Ministry in the morning, but will take the rest of the afternoon off. Why don’t you two drop by my apartment when you’re ready?”

“Will do Tonks. See ya tomorrow.”

“Hey Tonky...you think maybe Harry’s been right in front of us talking to us and we never knew?” Ginny asked.

The pink-haired auror frowned at the nickname. “It’s possible but I kind of doubt it. I wouldn’t put it past him to try but I think we’re clever enough to spot his mannerisms even if he was in disguise.” Tonks got a haughty smirk. “I mean I am an auror.”

Ginny rolled her eyes at her cocky friend. She placated her a bit and said “Of course you are. But sometimes I think he’s a lot cleverer than we’re giving him credit for. Hey, where’s your bathroom? You know I hate public toilets and I’m hungry and ready for lunch.”

“Down the hall, second door on the right.”

The doorbell rang and Tonks yelled out “That’d be Hermione.”

Tonks opened the door “Hey Hermione” she said before she noticed standing next to her was Ginny Weasley. The auror had her wand out and pointed at the redhead in less than a second. “Who are you?”

She kept both eyes on the two girls at her door and was shifting her wand between the pair.

“Ease up Tonks. It’s us. Remember, lunch today?” Hermione said trying to calm down her jumpy friend.

The cautious auror asked “What is as green as a fresh pickled toad?”

Hermione started snickering and Ginny just blushed and dropped her head in embarrassment at the reminder.

"It is you!" Tonks exclaimed before turning away from the two girls and ran to the bathroom door. She barged in, wand out and alert, took notice of the surroundings and yelled out "Oh you have got to be kidding me!"

Ginny and Hermione were a bit confused when they heard the exclamation from down the hallway at Tonks place. "I'm gonna kill that twerp! I can't believe he did that!"

Ginny smiled. "Harry get ya again?"

"Spelled my bathroom into Slytherin colors with a mirrored ceiling. Cheeky bugger. You just missed him by seconds. Unless someone else was impersonating Ginny here today." She said with a shake of her head. She was replaying their conversation over and feeling a bit humbled.

The three floored to the Leaky Cauldron and walked down to the more upscale restaurant. They were seated outside on the patio so they could enjoy the beautiful day. And keep their eyes and ears open for potential mayhem.

Hermione had been watching Tonks while they walked and once they were comfortably seated asked, "Alright Tonks. What did Harry say to you? Because I've watched your expressions go from shame to anger to frustration and back again several times now."

Tonks frowned. "He called me 'Tonky'." Hermione and Ginny both burst out laughing out loud.

"It's not that funny."

Ginny, still smiling and snickering, said "Wait does that I mean I can get away with calling you Tonky? I figured you'd hex me immediately if I called you that."

"Well you'd be getting one for sure if you ever do that now."

Hermione composed herself and asked "So what else did he say to you?"

Tonks expression went back to shame and shook her head exasperatedly.

"Come on, you can tell us. I could promise not to laugh but it'd be a pretty hollow promise I'm guessing." Hermione pleaded with a smile.

Tonks eventually answered. "He asked me if I ever thought maybe we'd been in front of 'Harry' and just not known it."

Ginny was giggling. "Oh that was subtle. And what sort of amusing birthday present of an answer did you give him?"

Tonks just shook her head. "Doesn't matter. So shut it. Or I won't tell you what happened at the Ministry this morning."

Hermione pulled out a small muggle notebook and was writing something in it. Ginny asked the obvious "Umm Hermione, what are you doing?"

"Oh. I'm just adding this to the list."

Tonks and Ginny glanced at each other. "And what list is that?"

Hermione smiled up at them. "Things to ask Harry about when we finally get him. I have a feeling his conversation with Tonks will be a lot funnier when he tells it." Tonks just scowled and shook her head. Though she did think it was a good idea Hermione had. Heaven knows Tonks probably had a few hundred things she needed to hear about from Harry's point of view.

Tonks continued. "Anyways, about this morning, I have no idea how he pulled it off, but Harry managed to completely disrupt the Ministry. It was still a madhouse when I left. Fudge thought we were under attack, people were freaking out. I would have never thought it possible, if it hadn't of happened."

Ginny and Hermione were quite curious. "So what did happen?"

Tonks smiled and said "Somehow, for an hour, Harry managed to completely negate all the magic. I suppose it was some sort of nullification. Everyone was stuck on their floors, the floo, portkeys, even everyone's wands. We were all muggles trapped for an hour."

Ginny smiled. Hermione's eyes went wide. "That far a nullification field? Including on the people? That shouldn't be possible. And certainly to not tire him out at all so he could visit you a couple hours later."

Tonks snickered. "Well that wasn't all. It seems likely he was capable of magic. All the people in the atrium were knocked out. When the magic was turned back on, and they came to, they noticed some changes in the Fountain of Magical Brethren."

Ginny got a wicked smirk. "Oh no. What did he do?"

Tonks was snickering. "Well, the house elf is now the biggest part of it. He's about 8 feet tall or so. He's got red and blue tights on and a pair of mismatched socks. He was posing and looking upward, with a cape on. And the main wizard that used to be the focal point is on his hands and knees. The centaur is now holding the leash attached to the wizard's collar. The goblin was sitting in a saddle riding on the witch." Tonks was outright laughing now. "Personally, I like the new one. They were trying to figure out how to undo it or fix it still when I left."

Hermione just shook her head. "Yeah. That couldn't be anyone else."

Tonks added "I think Fudge was worried about a House Elf rebellion."

Ginny was still giggling. "Maybe all the members of spew are going to be blacklisted."

Hermione exclaimed indignantly "It's not spew! It's ..." She just closed her eyes and shook her head. "I hate you all."

Their waiter brought out their meals and was flashing them a brilliant smile worthy of Gilderoy Lockhart. "Can I get you lovely ladies anything else? Coffee? Some dessert?" He looked over at Tonks and winked. "You look like you could use something sweet."

Ginny and Hermione were not prepared for Tonks to whip out her wand and quickly stun the man.

Tonks cringed. "Ahh crud."

Hermione yelled. "Tonks! What on earth are you doing?"

Ginny was equally curious. "Yeah, I mean he is a bit of a slimeball. And he's wearing way too much flair, but even I think that was a bit extreme."

Tonks shook her head. "Sorry. The way he winked at me, I thought he might have been Harry. But he's not. Just needs to lay off the winking at me."

Ginny seemed to be thinking it over. "How are you so sure he's not Harry now?"

"Harry wouldn't fall to a stunner like that."

"Then why cast it?"

"Well...at least it answers the question of whether he's Harry or a slimeball. Or I suppose I should say, a slimeball that isn't Harry."

It was at this point a couple of first year's parents were seen hurrying away towards the exit out of Diagon Alley. The father was carrying their daughter and had his hand covering her eyes. The mother was heard angrily exclaiming "Magic wands indeed!"

They noticed a bit of a commotion and a crowd gathering in front of Ollivander's. The three girls left money on the table for their food and quickly headed out. The slimeball was still stunned laying on the ground.

When the girls got to the crowd and saw in Ollivander's window, they realized what was going on. Ginny was just guffawing and Tonks was laughing her head off. Ollivander could be seen in the window trying to get through some wards that were apparently protecting his front display. The purple cushion on display no longer held the old familiar wand it always had. It appeared someone had swapped it out, and replaced it with a quite recognizable object. The impressive sized, flesh colored sexual aid was apparently not what parents of first years had in mind when they wanted to get their children their first wand. Ollivander seemed to be struggling to remove the offensive item. On closer examination, there was a toe tag of sorts tied around it. Hanging off was a small note that said "Property of Severus Snape." Harry's birthday was turning out far happier for some than others.

Author's Note: I wasn't planning on writing out much backstory, but I may eventually get around to it because explanation in author's notes is poor storytelling. To avoid confusion though, the general timeline is going to be something like this: Follows canon post-OotP. 6th year, Nicholas Flamel teaches DADA. Same with 7th year. A little over a year later, after Harry turned 19, he finished off the Dark Lord and a big chunk of Death Eaters. Now the story takes off roughly 9 months since he was last heard from and this chapter would have been his 20th birthday. I'm just trying to clarify this, as the one-year anniversary of his disappearance is coming up in future chapters. If you're really bored, all the Quibbler articles and photographers are going to be relatively simple name anagrams. And most often related (as in for each story, the photog and the author will relate to each other). Reviews are appreciated. Thanks.

CHAPTER TWO

Severus Snape was quite surprised when he received an owl delivering a wand box from Ollivander. He knew he hadn't been in there in years and his wand was working just fine. Upon opening his package the man's rage skyrocketed. It took an awful lot of effort not to yell out 'Potter' and curse that cheeky brat. He wouldn't admit to liking the boy. Never. But after all their private tutoring sessions he had respected him. In truth, Harry was already more proficient at the Dark Arts than Severus was. It made no sense to the Potions Master, as his disposition should have prevented him from being able to master so many aspects of them, but of course the little punk would be able to overcome all the previous rules about a wizard's skill or potential. But now, he was beginning to regret the deal he made the day after the Dark Lord's defeat.

He was sick and tired of playing the role of the 'evil' Slytherin head of house. And he wanted to retire from spying. It had seemed like too good an offer at the time. He should have known better. Harry offered to manipulate and essentially remove the Dark Mark in exchange for a friendly truce of sorts. Honestly, Severus had thought Harry wouldn't be able to do anything to the Dark Mark anyway, but given the lack of the Dark Lord, who should have been the only one able to do anything to it, Severus figured it wouldn't hurt. He knew if anyone would be able to, it would be the little insufferable brat whose scar connection offered the potential that no one else would have.

Cheeky brat had said "Here's the deal: If I can either remove the mark or manipulate it enough to seem that way, then all I ask is that you treat me good-naturedly and as a friend. That means I can prank you, and you can appreciate the pranks for what they are. And of course you can prank me right back even worse if you wish."

Severus responded with a smirk, "In fairness I must remind you, that I am the Slytherin in this equation." Considering the boy's smile and nod of the head, Severus was beginning to wonder who really was the Slytherin in that equation. Sure enough, the kid pulled out his little trophy, the Dark Lord's wand, mumbled some Latin involving 'Morsmordre' and Severus felt magic pulling at him down to his very

core. The Mark burned and visually shifted into a much smaller shape before morphing into a phoenix and moving up his arm to his bicep. Severus would never admit it, but more than likely the cheeky brat knew that the Mark had a deeper connection on him and added to his hostile and dark disposition. Harry's manipulation in truth had made him a more jovial person. 'Curse that boy for seeing me smile!'

Had he still had the Dark Mark, he would not have appreciated this latest prank. Sadly now, even Severus was chuckling at the thought of children running scared of the shape and materials used in Ollivander's new modern wands. He had the perfect revenge already planned. He knew how to cut deep back into the heart of Harry Potter. Next school year, he would be sure to play up the legend, the hero, the greater than Merlin awe inspiring power and might, of Harry Potter. Knowing your opponent's weakness makes revenge so much easier. And if Severus had anything to say about it, Harry Potter would never be normal. 'Maybe I should talk to Creevey and get the Chocolate Frog Company to run an entire series of nothing but Harry Potter.'

It was Saturday. Hermione and Tonks were going to have lunch with Ginny and Luna. Luna actually had provided them with the most leads on finding Harry Potter, even though Luna seemed unconcerned about locating him. In truth, Luna was probably Harry's best friend that was not a member of the Order. She had been offered a place, but declined and instead used her family's publication to offer information and a more neutral point of view. The fact that the Quibbler wasn't exactly the most respected of papers never bothered her in the slightest. Actually nothing seemed to really bother her ever come to think of it.

Not only that, this Saturday was the day the Quibbler's weekly publication came out. Just before leaving to meet with Ginny and Luna, Tonks and Hermione decided to read up on the latest sightings in the Quibbler.

The Quibbler presents: This week in Harry Potter!

Harry Potter, the Sherpa?

By: Evan Silly Photo by: Peter Tojams

Billionaire tycoon Malcolm Watchawiggie completed his quest and goal to reach the summit of Mount Everest. He managed to make the

ascent and then descent without any casualties. Two experienced climbers and one sherpa were the extent of his entire crew. The photo on the right is after they managed to make it safely back down the mountain. You can clearly see the lightning bolt scar on the head of the unnamed and overloaded sherpa. His identity was not confirmed, as apparently sherpa's get no respect, but the photograph should give the witches and wizards of Britain all the proof they need.

Tonks exclaimed "The Sherpa? Are they serious?"

Hermione responded with a condescending glare.

Tonks thought about it and agreed. "Okay nevermind. I would never believe this one, although the existence of the scar actually leads some credence to it."

Hermione responded, "Tonks, Harry has been lots of places without his scar, you know polyjuice can overcome it."

Tonks responded "Yeah but...but..." She was visibly struggling to get out the words she wanted to say. "Oh forget it. Stupid oath."

Hermione smirked at her. "Are you trying to tell me Harry's a metamorphmagus?"

Tonks gulped and responded, "Umph...umph...umph. Oww!"

Hermione started laughing. "Forget it. That was too funny anyway. Least now I know an easy way to keep you quiet." Tonks felt obliged to smack Hermione upside the head.

"And I suppose you cannot talk about his secret super bookworm powers." Tonks said before sticking her tongue out at the young woman.

"Let's get to lunch."

The pair arrived to find Luna and Ginny already deep in discussion. Ginny exclaimed "Oh my goodness! You really got one! And have it as a pet?"

Luna smiled a bit less dreamily than usual and nodded eagerly. Tonks and Hermione sat down. Hermione asked "Got one what?"

Luna looked over at Hermione and responded. "I received a package marked as a belated birthday present, which is odd, as my birthday is in two months so it would be better served as a premature present, rather than a present received ten months belatedly."

Hermione seemed to be getting a bit flustered at the complete lack of an answer she received. Tonks inquired, "So what did you get?"

Ginny was watching Hermione's expression while Luna smiled and said "I got a Crumple Horned Snorkack." Ginny was not disappointed to see Hermione's jaw drop and eyes widen.

"They're real?" a shocked Hermione asked.

Luna looked at Hermione and spoke to her like she was scolding a small child. "Of course they are real. Even if I hadn't received one of my own, they would still be real." She was shaking her head at her usually logical and knowledgeable bookworm friend. "Honestly Hermione. Tsk tsk."

Hermione was feeling a bit humbled and was beginning to wonder if she needed to change her opinion of her somewhat spacey friend.

"I'm just happy the Fairy Godmother remembered my 10 months belated birthday."

No, Hermione didn't feel the need to alter her opinion of Luna too much.

Tonks took advantage of the brief silence as the others looked curiously at Luna. "So Luna, Harry Potter, the Sherpa? Where the heck did you come up with that one?"

Luna smiled. "I just print what he sends me. If he says he was a sherpa, who am I to doubt him?"

Ginny asked the obvious, “‘He’? Who is ‘he’ Luna?”

“Why Harry Potter of course.”

Tonks and Hermione’s eyes widened at this. “What! Harry sends you those articles?”

Luna looked at Hermione curiously. “Of course he does. Who else would write ‘This week in Harry Potter’?” Luna had thought this the most obvious thing in the world.

“But today’s was written by Evan Silly!”

Luna eyes popped out a bit. “I don’t think I was supposed to tell you that. Oops.”

Ginny looked at Luna. “What is with you Luna? You’re usually so good at keeping secrets.”

Luna blushed a bit. “Sorry, I’m a bit off today. The Snorkack food delivery guy came by this morning, and he was really cute so we had wild monkey sex.”

Tonks started snickering. “There’s a Snorkack food delivery service? What was the guy’s name?”

“Harry.”

All three of the other girls immediately snapped to attention at this. “Harry! Are you sure it was Harry? What was his last name?”

“Well he said his name was Harry, but I didn’t ask his last name.”

“I mean, was it Harry?”

“I think that’s kind of a personal question, but if you must know I’ll answer after we’re done eating.” Ginny and Hermione both made faces of disgust.

Tonks was just getting frustrated. “Harry Potter! Was it Harry Potter?”

Luna pursed her lips thoughtfully. "Dunno. Like I said I never asked his last name."

The three girls just fell into silence watching Luna enjoy her salad.

Ginny broke the silence getting back to what they were talking about before any mentions of wild monkey sex. "So Harry has been sending you articles every week?"

Luna nodded. "And pictures. The articles have the pseudonyms to use with them. A few times he's sent me personal notes as well."

"Can we see them? What'd he say?"

"Well, they're kind of personal. Don't say a lot, since I can't write him back, just occasionally tips on things to investigate. He told me to keep my eyes open for Fudge inciting a House Elf rebellion."

Hermione thought of something. "What about the Snorkack food delivery service? Where are they?"

Luna answered. "The information for them came with the Snorkack. I've got my receipt from this morning right here." She reached into her pocket and pulled out a small piece of parchment. "Oh."

Apparently the receipt was now blank. On the back it still had the company slogan: 'Where the customer always comes first.'

The other three girls half figured as much. Though there seemed to be a bit of jealousy in the air.

"So how are you going to get more Snorkack food?"

Luna said "I guess I will have to go to the store once this supply runs out."

"There's a store?"

“Of course there are stores. Even this restaurant we’re at could be considered a store. Snorkack food is just lettuce.”

Hermione closed her eyes and felt she needed to calm down.

The rest of the meal passed amicably enough, although it certainly seemed Luna was in the best mood of the four. They paid for the meals and went off their separate ways.

Tonks and Hermione were thinking about what the next thing to do was.

Hermione mentioned she had a muggle geek friend.

Tonks asked “So what can the geek do for you?”

“Oh, it should make finding out information online so much easier. He’s scripted a program that will scour all news reports and published findings for certain things and alert me to any that hit certain flags and rate them accordingly to likelihood of it being Harry.”

“Wow that should be helpful. What did you have to do to get this geek to help you?”

Hermione explained, “Oh Tonks, he’s a geek. It doesn’t matter if I’m attractive or not, just the fact that I’m a girl means he’ll help me out with anything I ask. He may not know about magic, but there’s nothing better than a geek friend.”

“Don’t you kinda feel like you’re using him?” Tonks inquired with a raised eyebrow.

“A little, but it makes him happier than if I weren’t using him.” Hermione said with a shrug.

Tonks was beginning to think she could use a geek friend. Or maybe a Snorkack food delivery guy.

"I think he sent me a working prototype of the program last night. I didn't read the email though. Want to come over and see what it turns up?"

Tonks smiled. "Sure. I have a feeling we've missed a lot of the newsworthy things Harry's done."

The pair went back to Hermione's and fired up the program.

"Results 1-10 of 8,251,977. Good god Hermione!"

"I doubt they're all correct but we can see what the first few say. Alright, let's take a look at what the first one is. Oh this sounds good: News of the Weird."

Exorcism Ineffectual!

A catholic church was in an uproar when the building next to them was renovated, torn down, and a new openly homosexual biker bar opened up next to it. The Hairy Bear has tried their best to appease and placate their religious neighbors. They are always closed Sundays and keep their parking area clean, but apparently that isn't enough for St. Charles Church. Recently, the parishioners hired and brought in outside help since they were lacking any legal recourse. Father Snuffles Black came in to attempt to exorcise the demons at The Hairy Bear while it was open and catering to its customers. Apparently the exorcism was ineffectual, and there have been some concerns expressed questioning the sanctity of Father Black. Reports indicate that Father Black chanted many things in Latin within the establishment of The Hairy Bear. It is not clear exactly what happened, but apparently the karaoke machine was affected by the chanting and turned on inexplicably. The church officially discharged the exorcist when he was on stage singing "It's Raining Men" rather than exorcising any demons.

"Oh dear Harry." Hermione said while Tonks was just laughing her head off.

Tonks, in between laughs managed to get out, "Padfoot would be so proud!"

Hermione went back to the search and looked through a few more results. One immediately caught her eye: an Associated Press news brief from the states.

Who Paid the Pied Piper?

A scene disrupted traffic through lower Manhattan yesterday in New York City. An older Scottish woman, who was identified as Minerva McGonagall, came walking calmly out of a large sewer grate. She was playing a flute, and following behind her filling the streets was reportedly thousands of sewer rats. Traffic was at a standstill for twenty minutes before the 'rat parade' made it to a pier and apparently all jumped in. Surprisingly, Ms. McGonagall was not seen again, but the rats were apparently able to swim and were headed out towards the Atlantic. New York citizens are advised to keep their children on leashes if at all possible.

"Oh you have got to share that one with the Professor!" Tonks exclaimed.

"No way! She'll kill me! You share it with her." Hermione said.

"Hmm." Tonks was musing. "Maybe we should anonymously inform Snape of this, and let him."

"Oh that's just evil." Hermione smirked. "Alright that works."

They went back to the searches and found it hard to imagine there were this many things that sounded like they could all be arguably Harry. If you believed it, Harry went over Niagara Falls in a barrel, hang-glided off the Eiffel Tower, rode a rampaging bull through the streets of Pamplona, and perhaps swam naked with some sea lions in the San Francisco Bay.

Tonks was giggling. "I want to find him just to do something now!"

Hermione was smiling and shaking her head. "He missed out on a lot growing up, but goodness he is quickly making up for that."

CHAPTER THREE

Tonks was relaxing on her couch at home with the news on, but only half-heartedly keeping an eye open for Harry to show up on screen and wink at her.

Her fireplace flared green and she answered the firecall. "Hey Hermione. What's up?"

"I think I know where Harry is going to be tomorrow." Hermione said with a smirk.

"Oh yeah? You sure it's not just a red herring he left to trick you into something embarrassing?"

"Don't say things like that! You're just going to jinx us before we even start." Hermione yelled indignantly.

Tonks rolled her eyes. "Okay. So where is Harry going to be and how did you find out?"

"Well, I was just flipping through the paper and saw an ad for an event tomorrow morning that will be too good for Harry to pass up."

Tonks eyebrow curled upwards waiting for Hermione to continue. It appeared she was wanting to be asked. "And that is?"

Hermione sure loves explaining and always perks up when she's asked a question. "St. Mungo's is hosting a charity auction tomorrow morning. All proceeds go towards the building of a new children's wing. The last item up for auction is an all expenses paid Dinner Party to be hosted at Malfoy Manor, with Draco Malfoy assisting as an honorary co-host. Malfoy's even the one sponsoring the auction tomorrow. Throwing around the money to make sure he still looks good in the public eye."

"Yeah, he's a git, but even you can see this is a good thing he's doing. And you're right. This has Harry Potter mayhem written all over it. I wonder if he could get a muggle dinner party out of it. Draco would

have to completely fumigate the place after that. Silly git thinks 'muggle cooties' are contagious." Tonks finished with a shake of her head.

"The auction starts at 10:00 AM, and I doubt it will be much more than an hour so we can still meet Remus for lunch."

"That's right. We agreed on The Leaky Cauldron, didn't we?" Tonks asked.

"Yup. Tom's food is a bit suspect on occasion, but you cannot beat always having the back room to ourselves. I'm about to firecall Ginny. I'd invite Ron but I know he's still got Saturday morning practices. We'll be by around 9:30 to make sure and wake you in time for the auction."

"Thanks Hermione."

The three girls were getting a bit restless. It was already 11:30, there were only two items left up for auction, and there had been no sign of Harry Potter. Tonks was pretty sure the old lady in the front row was up to something, but Ginny and Hermione thought she was just being paranoid. The last item up for bid was the Dinner Party at Malfoy Manor. But first, they had to auction off a somewhat perverted piece of history. Helga Hufflepuff, one of the founders of Hogwarts as well as one of the most prominent healers in the last couple millennia, had what could only be called grandma panties on display and up for auction. According to the brochure, they were hoping to fetch at least 50-60 galleons for a pair of old knickers.

There was a surprising amount of action for this one. The auctioneer took a bid of 64 galleons from the greasy man in the back row, before he was interrupted by a tug on his sleeve. Somehow, the auctioneer had been completely oblivious to a small child's approach. The young boy who couldn't have been more than 9, was wearing the most adorable pinstripe suit and carrying a miniature briefcase, and was tugging on the auctioneer's sleeve.

"Scuse me, sir? Do all the money really go to a new kids' wing?" the bold little boy asked.

The auctioneer smiled at the child. "Yes son. Every knut from the auction goes straight into the fund."

The child, identified as "Simon" by a Healer asking him what he was doing here, puffed himself up like an important businessman and responded primly "Healer Jones, I received a reprieve from my daily conundrum, and have the entire afternoon to entertain myself."

"Simon, do you know what those words you just said mean?"

"Heck no. It's just what my Uncle Poncy told me to 'member."

Draco, who was sitting idly in the front row, simply here for appearance's sake, snapped to attention at the mention of the boy's Uncle.

Healer Jones asked, "Well what are you doing here Simon?"

"Uncle Poncy asked me to place some bets!"

"I think you mean bids. And where is your Uncle Poncy?"

This was the question that had Hermione, Ginny, Tonks, and Draco's eyes wide and quickly scanning the room.

"He had to go take care of some other bidness and asked me to bet for him."

"Well there are only two items left to auction, Simon. Are you here to bid on the, ahem, artifact from Helga Hufflepuff?"

"Yup! Is it time for me to make that one?" the annoyingly cute little child asked.

"I suppose it is, yes. The current bid is..." Healer Jones looked up at the auctioneer.

"64 galleons at the moment," the Auctioneer responded.

Simon smiled widely. "Okie-dokily. I'd like to bet 10 million galleons please."

The entire crowd went silent at that. Half the people looked at the child like he was crazy. No one said a word or made a sound.

The auctioneer cleared his throat. "Well then. I have 10 million galleons. Any other bids?" He was making an obvious show of pretending to look for new bids. "Going once...Going twice..."

"Sold! To Simon for Ten Million Galleons!"

Simon jumped up in the air and pumped his fist and let out a "Whoop!" He ran up to the stage and pulled out an official Gringotts bank draft for a completely legitimate 10 million galleons. The auctioneer was flabbergasted this had really just happened. Simon ignored the administrative people huddled around the official notarized bank draft, and Simon ran over to the knickers. He picked up the entire display they were on, and opened his little briefcase. It was obviously magical and he pushed the display and knickers into the briefcase. When Simon closed it, there was a visible swirl of magic and a loud pop and the briefcase disappeared. Simon yelled out an excited "Cool!"

He then went to go stand back at the side of a row, and apparently was trying to act like everyone else around him as he was waiting to bid on the next item.

The auctioneer called for silence at all the crazy mutterings going on, and announced the final item up for bid. "The last item in today's auction is a complete Dinner Party, with the winner having full control over the guest list up to 100 invitees, to be hosted in conjunction with our generous sponsor today, Mr. Draco Malfoy, at the luxurious and impressive Malfoy Manor. Let's start the bidding at...actually, Simon were you planning to make a bid?"

"Yes sir!" Simon answered with a smile.

"Go ahead Simon." The auctioneer encouraged.

“Okie-dokily. I’d like to bet 2 knuts!”

And once again, the crowd was shocked into silence. Well, except for Tonks’ snickering and Ginny’s outright laughing. Everyone else was still staring at the adorable little Simon. Draco’s face was completely pink. Which considering how pale the poor boy is, is as close to an angry raging red as he can get. He was swearing and cursing and muttering about “killing Potter” and “gutting Golden Boy” and “destroying Scarhead.”

While everyone else was focusing on the scene sponsor Draco Malfoy was making, the auctioneer saw an opportunity. He quietly said, “We have a bid of two knuts. Going once....”

No one was paying any attention. He covered his mouth with his hand a bit and whispered “Going twice...”

Hermione noticed what was going on and was tempted to bid three knuts and then just stand up Draco. But she decided Simon deserved this one.

“SOLD! For two knuts to Simon!” The auctioneer yelled out as loud as he could.

Simon threw both his arms in the air in triumph. “Awesome!”

Luckily Draco was already completely incensed and insulted and swearing to get his bloody satisfaction on the Scarhead that he barely noticed no one overbid little Simon.

Simon walked up to the auctioneer again, pulled two knuts out of his pocket, and handed them to the auctioneer. He walked over towards where Draco was having a little fit. He put a hand on Draco’s wrist and temporarily calmed the Malfoy scion.

“We’ll be in touch.” Simon said with a completely serious and professional face.

He then turned around and walked away from him. He spotted the pink hair he was looking for, and walked up to the funny looking woman.

“Aunt Tonky? Uncle Poncy said if I smiled enough, you and Aunt Hermy and Aunt Ginny would buy me lunch.” Simon said and then made the biggest widest brightest smile he could. He had lost two of his front teeth and had dimples that truly made him irresistible when he smiled that big. “Cuz I just spent my last two knuts and I’m hungry.”

Tonks could only laugh at the adorable little Simon. “Sure we will Simon. We’re headed to the Leaky Cauldron to meet another friend of ours.”

Ginny couldn’t take it and had to reach down and hug the adorable little child. The three girls and Simon left the auction holding hands and were headed to a fireplace to floo to the Leaky Cauldron.

Remus was running late. ‘Why do books have to be so darn fascinating?’ All he wanted to do was kill a little time looking around Flourish and Blotts before lunch. And of course there had to be a new book on wandless magic. A subject that has seriously frustrated the old Marauder for a couple years now. By the time he looked at his watch again he was already five minutes late for lunch.

He wasn’t even paying attention and ran right into a young man when he turned the corner. They both fell to the ground. Remus was in a big hurry, double-checked that the young man wasn’t visibly hurt, and asked “Are you okay?”

The young man was dusting himself off and responded. “Just fine Mr. Moony, just fine. I can tell you’re in a hurry too, so take care.” And the young man started heading off briskly in the direction he was originally headed.

Remus nodded, said “thank you,” and started hurrying off towards the Leaky Cauldron. He had taken about two steps and froze in place. He sniffed the air once. He cocked his head to side. He sniffed the air a second time, a much deeper breath. He turned towards the young man heading away from him. “Pronglet! Wait!”

The young man turned to smile at Remus and just disappeared into thin air.

“Dog gone it Harry!” a flustered Remus yelled. “I hate you!”

Remus arrived in the back room of the Leaky Cauldron to find Tonks, Hermione, Ginny, and a cute young boy in a pinstripe suit all sitting together. He cast all his usual silencing and protection charms on the door. When he turned back to his lunch group the small child yelled out an enthusiastic “Uncle Moony!”

“Hello. It seems like you know my name. Anyone care to introduce me?”

Ginny spoke up. “Of course Remus, I’d like you to meet Simon. Uncle Poncy suggested we all have lunch together. Simon here just won an entire Dinner Party at Malfoy Manor at the auction we came from.”

Simon was smiling and nodding vigorously.

“I’m sure that pleased Draco.”

“I got it for two knuts!” Simon exclaimed jovially.

Remus’s eyes widened and he smiled a very amused smile. “I don’t know about Draco, but I always heard the rumors that all it took to get into Lucius’s bed was to have a pair of-”

“Remus!” A truly frightened Hermione yelled. It had the desired effect of reminding the old Marauder he was in front of a small child.

Simon didn’t even seem to notice. “Uncle Poncy said if I did it right, I would be able to get a party for me and everyone else at the hospital in the party for just the two knuts Uncle Poncy gave me. If I got overbid, then I got to keep the two knuts for me anyways.” Apparently Simon is quite excitable.

Remus smiled and responded, "Well, I have a feeling I just literally ran into Uncle Poncy, so Hermione, would you mind scanning me for errant spells or tracers or who knows what else."

Hermione got up and cast a few charms. "Nothing I recognize but I can see a ladybug on your shoulder from here."

Remus looked over and down at his left shoulder and his eyes widened. "Umm, I'm pretty sure that's not a normal ladybug."

The ladybug in question took this opportunity to fly up into the air, and land in the exact center of the table they were all seated around. It was apparently assisting them in putting itself on display.

"Is that a construct of some kind?" Hermione asked looking closer at it.

Tonks suggested "Maybe Harry is taking after the muggles and planting bugs on people. It's probably just a listening charm or something."

The ladybug spoke up in a familiar voice. "It's a lot more than that, Aunt Tonky."

"Uncle Poncy!" Simon exclaimed.

"Harry! Is that you?" Ginny asked with wide eyes.

The ladybug was laughing at them. Well actually the ladybug hadn't been moving at all, but you could hear laughing coming from it. "Yes it is me, and no I'm not the ladybug. Just needed to test some communication techniques with these, and thought you might appreciate the sound of my lovely voice. Have fun at the auction Simon?"

"It was awesome! I got the Party for two knuts just like you said!"

"That's great Simon. You should ask Mr. Malfoy if he will let you play with his pet ferrets when you have the party." Hermione's eyes

widened at the thought of Draco killing small children and scolded Harry for it.

Remus was still in awe that Harry was for the first time, in actual open communication with them. "Harry, so does this mean we're going to be able to contact you? We've been dern close to catching you, you know. It's just a matter of time."

The smug little ladybug responded. "You really think you guys can keep up with me? I only gave you this ladybug, because I wanted to test the untraceability of it. I doubt you'll be able to break it, but Hermione might get lucky. But I figured I'd give you a shot. As it stands I still have a good decade of childhood to work through. In addition to one other significant project."

Ginny exclaimed "Take me with you!" at the exact same time Tonks yelled out "I wanna have your child-" a brief awkward pause "-hood."

"I'm still around you guys, but I want to get this one big project done before I make any public appearances."

Hermione was intrigued. "So is this communications device a part of the big project?"

"Well, a small part, yes, but it is a lot more than a communications device. You have to watch it closely. Moony, stand directly over it, and carefully watch the colors on the ladybug. I'll show you one of the other things it can do."

Remus thought about this carefully. And was a bit hesitant. The ladybug pleaded, "Come on Moony, it's too subtle to notice unless you're paying close attention. You know I'd never actually hurt you."

A grumbled "fine" and Remus was looking at the shell on the ladybug intently. Harry was mumbling something in Latin, and only the last word did Remus catch and process: 'serpentsortia.' Unfortunately, it was only as his mind processed this that a small conjured snake flew straight out of the ladybug and chomped down quickly on Remus's unsuspecting nose.

Tonks shrieked, Simon yelped, and Hermione and Ginny both gasped. All four of them were quickly overshadowed by the extremely high-pitched girlish screaming Remus was wailing out. His arms were flapping up and down like a chicken as he squealed and whimpered and ran around the room. He realized the snake was not letting go and was still screaming and now tugging viciously on the snake attached to his face. He had fallen backward out of the room and was still screaming. After calming down for a brief second, Remus ripped the snake as hard as he could and it detached from his face with a loud POP. Shortly thereafter the snake dissolved into the air, right in Remus's hands. It was at this point he realized he was in the main dining area of the Leaky Cauldron and everyone was staring at him. He saw the silencing charm on their private room was working because all four of his lunch mates were visibly laughing their heads off and not a sound could be heard. As he realized his nose was fine, and there hadn't even been any blood when the snake bit him, Remus finally caught on to what had happened. A brightly blushing Remus Lupin calmly walked back into his private room, and repaired the door he seemed to have crashed through.

As he came in he heard Simon asking, "Uncle Poncy is that why you asked me if I was afraid of snakes earlier?"

A very amused voice could be heard coming from the ladybug saying "Yup. Well that and because of Draco too."

"Good god Pronglet. You're scaring years of my life." A reluctant Remus responded.

The ladybug placated, "Eat some chocolate Moony. You look like you could use something sweet. Don't you agree Tonks?"

"YOU!" Tonks exclaimed. "You were there!"

The ladybug was mocking her. "Of course I was there. I was the slimeball with too much flair on."

Hermione pieced this together first. "You faked being stunned!"

"Well I wasn't about to announce to the world I was Harry Potter."

Simon was thinking briefly. "Uncle Poncy? You're Harry Potter?"

"Not usually Simon, but I have been on occasion. I know I prefer being Uncle Poncy."

Ginny asked "So you were just going to lie there and pretend to be stunned all day?"

The ladybug turned a little towards Ginny and responded. "Of course not. I was playing with using thought magic on a long distance switching spell. I swapped Snape's favorite possession, something he nicknamed "Lucy" but would never tell me more about, with the wand on Ollivander's cushion. I assumed Lucy was some giant gold or platinum cauldron and would crash through the display providing me with an opportunity to disappear unnoticed. Turns out I was a bit wrong on what Lucy was, but it worked just the same. Severus would kill me, if I didn't return it though, so I made sure and label it as his property."

Tonks paled a bit. "Wait, so that really was...his...oh forget it. I don't want to know."

The ladybug turned towards Tonks. "The ickle auror is scared." The ladybug snickered.

"Hey Simon, you know what Aunt Tonky's first name is?" the ladybug asked.

Tonks interrupted loudly "Hey now! Let's keep this clean!"

A muffled "Silencio" and a light shot out of the ladybug and nailed Aunt Tonky. The ladybug said "Sweet! I'm getting the hang of this aiming thing. Sorry about that Aunt Tonky, I owed you one for attempting to stun me, and I thought I'd rile you up a bit there. And if you're wondering Simon, Aunt Tonky's first name is Honky."

Simon was giggling at the angry silent pink-haired woman.

“Anyways, I have to work on a few more things. Hermione, disassemble this ladybug to your heart’s content and see if you can determine where I am at. Or rather where this bug’s receiver is located at. Simon, it was a blast meeting you, and I hope you have a great party. Inviting all the other children at the hospital should be perfect. And don’t let Draco Malfoy intimidate you. Deep down he’s a big softy, no matter how much he tries to hide it. Compliment something about him using the word ‘Slytherin’ and you’ll have him eating out of the palm of your hand.”

Remus, Hermione, Tonks, and Ginny’s eyes all went wide at that.

“Gotta go guys. And I’m still around. Just putting off growing up simply because I can. At least for a little while longer. Toodles.” The ladybug finished, and then flew up and landed in Hermione’s hair.

Simon was giggling at Hermione’s attempt at an angry scowl. Tonks was still trying to get someone to counter her silencing charm.

The rest of lunch passed quickly as Remus, Tonks, Hermione, and Ginny all got to know Simon better. They found out he had been living at St. Mungo’s for over a year, and that both his parents had died. He needed constant care, and a new children’s wing meant he would probably get a room of his own. Their hearts went out to the sweet young boy, and they were planning to come visit him again. They dropped him off back at St. Mungo’s after the long enjoyable meal and brief side trip to Fortescue’s for ice cream.

Remus informed the girls that there was going to be a full Order meeting at Grimmauld Place next week on the one-year anniversary of Harry’s disappearance. Apparently this was something Nicholas Flamel had requested of Dumbledore. So they hoped they might be getting some answers. There wasn’t any danger, but it had been a year, and anyone with information on Harry or who wanted to hear about the Harry hunting was told to be in attendance.

Tonks was last heard moaning, “Cheeky bugger silenced me so I couldn’t even order any Snorkack food.”

CHAPTER FOUR

The Quibbler presents: This week in Harry Potter!

Harry Potter, the Ecoterrorist Carnie?

By: Greg Prawngar Photo by: Sara Lee Awoggy

Tragedy has struck a small traveling circus in an apparent act of ecoterrorism. The traveling group thought they had just hired a new hit performer, The Amazing Boy Who Lives! An act in which he would set himself on fire and stand in front of a cannon as it went off. His debut performance while the troupe was in North Surrey was grandly received by the entire audience. But the next morning was broken with the realization that he was gone, and all of the circus troupe's animals had been either captured and stolen or freed. The Bearded Lady, who neither confirms nor denies reports of having a relationship with The Amazing Boy woke up and discovered she had been completely shorn. No more beard, or for that matter hair of any sort, including eyebrows. When she noticed her condition she started screaming. This woke up everyone else and they discovered their missing coworker and animals. His performance can be seen in the photo to the right. The Amazing Boy Who Lives is visible in the picture as the young man on the lower right. He can be identified as the only one in the picture on fire.

"Oh jeebus Tonks. This is one of the most ridiculous ones yet." Hermione complained after reading that day's Quibbler issue. It had been delivered while she was at the auction.

"You know, now that we know Harry writes these, it makes them less useful, but more entertaining and likely."

"You really think Harry joined the circus? You know just before giving away ten million galleons?" Hermione asked.

"Why not? You got anything better to go on?"

"Yeah! I got a ladybug that's going to lead me right to him."

"Oh yeah Hermione. I'm sure it will be simple and obvious if he's freely giving it to you and inviting you to try."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence. Don't jinx me or anything."

"Don't you need to work on lesson plans or something? This time last year you were freaking out and preparing like crazy. Worried you wouldn't be as good a professor as Binns had been." Tonks was shaking her head. "That was so funny."

Hermione scoffed. "I'll have you know I thought Professor Binns was extremely knowledgeable and a great scholar."

"And you've managed to completely gloss over the fact that he was too boring to actually instruct anything and a worse teacher than Snape." Tonks explained.

"Yeah there was that. But even still, I'm just teaching History. I'll use all the syllabi and materials from last year. It's not like 'History' changes or anything." Hermione rationalized to herself.

"What!" Tonks's eyes went wide.

"I'm just kidding Tonks." Hermione was snickering. "All throughout the year I was modifying and improving my lesson plans and syllabi. I've been ready for this school year since before the last one ended. Besides, Harry-hunting is a lot more fun."

"You know the Hermione I knew a couple of years ago would be appalled and shocked at your current attitude." Tonks said with a smirk.

"Yes and that Hermione would also leave the Harry-hunting to the untrained professionals like you. Are you trying to get rid of me?" Hermione responded with an equally playful smirk.

"Hmmp. I am quite well-trained thank you very much." The indignant auror responded.

Hermione rolled her eyes. "You most certainly are. House-broken and with a shiny coat like that you've gotten to be the most popular bitch on the block."

Tonks anger became palpable. "Don't make me tell Simon what an evil horrible person Aunt Hermy is."

"You wouldn't!" a horrified Hermione responded.

"Are you sure of that? Do you feel lucky, punk? Well, do ya?" Tonks imitated a deep raspy voice that sounded vaguely Scottish.

Hermione made a pained face. "Enough Tonks. That's the worst impression you've attempted yet."

"Yeah they are really bad, aren't they?"

A vigorously nodding Hermione said. "Good night Tonks."

"Night Aunt Hermy," she responded before disappearing out the floo. "You know Draco, when Carl told me you were arguably a child molester I defended you. Even made a small gentlemen's bet with him. He assured me any random little boy with a pair of nuts could get you to buy him dinner. Even throw him a party." The greasy man was shaking his head. "Why? Why do you do things like this to me?" the whiny Potions Master inquired of his godson.

"Oh crikey Severus. You wouldn't believe the number of tasteless jokes I am now the butt of." An exasperated young Malfoy answered.

"I might believe it. I helped come up with some." Snape said with a roll of his eyes.

"Any good ones?" Malfoy asked with a raised eyebrow.

"A few here and there. Quite a few people mentioning Ron Weasley and your obsession with him having two knuts to rub together."

Draco paled. "Oh Merlin. I was like 11! I didn't even think about what I was saying."

Severus smiled and said silkily, "Well at least at 11 you were too old for-"

"Is this really necessary?" Draco interrupted.

"Fine. Ruin my fun. Although the way the Daily Prophet reported it was rather curious."

"There was nothing incorrect in that article. I sponsored an auction and managed to raise over ten million galleons. I should be applauded for being the hero I am." A haughty young man responded.

"Right." Severus rolled his eyes.

"I would imagine Potter wanted to keep me happy and had his little publication print a truthful and fair article rather than make me the butt of any further jokes."

Severus smiled. "Yes I'm sure Potter is shaking in his boots at the thought of offending you."

Draco shrugged and adopted a playful smirk.

Severus continued. "Speaking of Potter, I'm dying to know what happened to your little tattoo. And how on earth you managed to stay out of Azkaban."

"The barmy old coot asked you to interrogate me for your meeting next week?"

Severus eyes betrayed him and a small momentary bit of surprise showed. "I'm curious how you would jump to that conclusion when it's been almost a year since there was a meeting."

"I heard from a friend that a certain spell was going to be lifted and to not be surprised when it happened. I can only assume it is being lifted because there are others being lifted. And besides, Dumbledore's leash on you has never been as slack as he liked to make it look."

Severus was quick to calm his rising ire. "And I'm sure you got your tattoo removed without any strings attached."

"I wouldn't think you would want to know these things Severus. But you know I will tell you, since I do owe you a great deal."

Severus found this acceptable and gave in to his curiosities. "Alright, how did you get your mark removed?"

Draco was relaxed and looked over at him, "The same way you got yours. Let me guess, you have a snake tattooed on your bicep now?"

Severus shook his head. "No a phoenix. I never even knew I had a choice."

Draco rolled up his sleeve. "I call him Tibbles." And he showed off the ice blue dragon tattoo that was moving around and flying in a circle around his arm.

"Ahh man yours moves too! I never knew I could get that!" Severus whined as painfully as he smirked.

"A phoenix because of the Order?" Draco assumed.

Severus just nodded with a frown still etched on his face. He could be so childish sometimes.

"That doesn't explain how you got him to do that for you." Severus pointed out.

Draco responded with a question, "Why did you turn traitor and join the Order?"

"I thought you were answering my questions here."

"We're having an open discourse between friends. It goes both ways."

"Fine. If you were anyone else I wouldn't answer this, but the truth is I have more of a conscience than I like. It was the right thing to do." Severus reluctantly explained.

“Oh, you Gryffindor, you! I was hoping there was something better than that.” Draco teased.

“Watch it brat. Now answer my question because I’m pretty damn sure you never joined the Order, even if I could tell you weren’t the most loyal of Death Eaters.”

“No. I had no interest whatsoever in joining the Order. The Order had leaks and spies and a lot of idiots. I’m a Malfoy. I pick the winning side.”

“The Order was the winning side.”

Draco shook his head. “No it wasn’t.” Severus arched an eyebrow asking for further explanations.

“No, this so called war between dark and light was only going to have one winning side. And it wasn’t necessarily the Order or the Death Eaters.” He sighed heavily and mumbled quietly. “It was always Potter’s.”

“You sound reluctant to respect your new Master.”

“Considering how much he would hate it, maybe we both should call him that.” Draco suggested.

“He’s yours, not mine.” Severus replied.

Draco responded defiantly, “Really? I was under the impression he actually has two marked followers.”

Severus hadn’t thought about that. He certainly had never felt anything on his mark since it had been changed. “Can he spy on us or communicate with us through them?”

Draco snorted. “Of course he can. Cheeky brat saved my life a half dozen times that first month because he was able to use the mark.”

Severus’s eyes widened. “That’s how all those other Death Eaters kept getting caught. They were going after you.”

"I did kind of mislead the Dark Lord into fighting Potter."

"Why on earth would you go to Potter and not me?"

"I thought about it. But I didn't want Dumbledore or the Order to know. Potter told me it would be easier if I talked to you, but I have a habit of trying to do the opposite of his suggestions usually." Draco had a snarky smile now.

"You know, young Slytherin, you've been manipulated by a Gryffindor." Severus laughed. "Potter told me I shouldn't approach you because you were already set in your ways and it could easily blow my cover. Turns out you were set in your ways, only Potter knew which way though. I didn't believe him, but couldn't risk it. Not when you seemed to be acting amicably to him. I assumed under orders from the Dark Lord."

Draco frowned. "I was under orders from the Dark Lord. Could Potter have tricked the Dark Lord into that you think?"

Severus shook his head. "That's a question we'll never know. Instinct says impossible, but even I would yield that Potter knew the Dark Lord better than anyone else. You beginning to think he manipulated you into coming to him and asking to be his little spy?"

Draco paused considering and thinking. "God I hate thinking about Potter. If you ever talk to him and actually see behind the image he projects, that kid is so Slytherin it's scary. You know he had bugged the common room for 6th and 7th year?"

"How? I frequently sweep for all sorts of charms and devices throughout all of Slytherin."

"Well you won't find it so don't worry. And I know because he has me monitoring it now. Helps me keep up on some current events, as well as to ensure proper Slytherins continue to be coming out of Hogwarts. The whole Dark Lord and the terrorizing wreaks havoc with our P.R. and image."

“Now who’s the goody goody?” An amused Severus asked.

Draco was getting a bit irate. “I’m doing it for my own benefit. And Slytherin’s. Not because it’s the right thing to do.”

“Of course.”

Draco just frowned at Severus.

“When was the last time you talked to Potter?”

Draco answered. “He’d only bark commands when Death Eaters were trying to kill me. Last time I talked to him in an actual conversation was the day before he disappeared. He said something you may dislike as much as I did actually.”

Severus sighed. “And what was that?”

Draco smiled. “He told me, ‘Everyone sees Snape as Dumbledore’s little pet reform project. Why do I have a feeling you’re going to be mine?’ I told him that was about as likely as ‘Snape smiling.’”

Severus started snickering.

“Oh god. Now you’re acting like he did. Don’t tell me you got all Hufflepuffish around him.”

“Hey! That’s below the belt. And given the existence of Tibbles on your arm there, I’m quite sure you were smiling and giggling too.”

“Crap. That was just before he made Tibbles.”

“So if you haven’t talked to him, who told you about the spell being lifted?”

“A portrait I was gifted did. Terribly attractive fellow. Quite useful.”

“Birthday gift? Without any indication who it was from?”

Draco nodded. "And yet no one has any doubts as to who it's from. So what did you receive for your birthday?"

Snape looked carefully at Draco. "I received an immense amount of potions supplies. Materials and ingredients that I thought were extinct. I believe it may have been the Dark Lord's private stores."

"No card?" Draco smugly asked.

"Actually there was small card with mine. It informed me, there was an unbreakable password protected vial with some substance I would want in it. And that I should just save it until someone gifts me the password. I couldn't open it, nor can I even identify the substance. It's some kind of black viscous liquid. And it is highly magical."

"I'm sure he added that in there just to bother you some more."

"It's worked. I cannot figure out what it could be. It's changed colors some occasionally."

Draco smiled. "I sure hope it's a joke and is just recording you saying things like "Gryffindors Rule" at it trying to guess the password."

Severus scowled. He had tried that password. "You said earlier you went with Potter because he was the winning side. What on earth made you think he was the winning side?"

Draco sighed. "You remember the last Quidditch match of 6th year? Us versus them?"

Snape shook his head. "It's kind of hard to forget that one. You could have been easily expelled."

"Yeah I know. I may have gone a bit too far. And it wasn't my most subtle moment. But that was absolutely crazy what Potter did. When his broom exploded, and he was leapfrogging from beater bats to Crabbe and Goyle's head until he latched one hand onto my broom. With his one hand pulling on it, he was able to exert more control over my broom than I was while I was sitting on it. When he dropped, I thought he had fallen, and was going to die. And I may not want to

admit it, but I felt a bit guilty then. When he managed to land in a rolling crouch and had the snitch in his hand, I gave up. And I realized the most horrible awful ugly truth I had ever found.” Draco raised his eyes and looked straight at Severus. “Harry Potter does not lose. It kills me to say that, but adopt that credo, and the rest of the world becomes your oyster. And all it really costs me is the occasional public humiliation, which I can sadly see the humor in.”

“That evil little sneak!”

Draco raised an inquiring eyebrow.

“He’s probably using our marks to make us have a rotten Gryffindor sense of humor!”

“Oh yeah? Does this have to do with your special wand going on display at Ollivanders?”

Severus shook his head. “Why am I not surprised you have heard about that?”

“Because I’m a Malfoy.”

“So was your father.” Severus shot back.

“He was too arrogant and greedy and had no sense of tact.”

Severus looked intently at Draco.

“Notice I said ‘too’. There’s nothing wrong with a healthy amount of arrogance and greed. Daddy’s biggest failing was the little fact that he was a homicidal psychopath.”

Severus snorted. “Ah yes. The dividing line between the homicidal psychopaths and the category I like to call ‘other’.”

“And how often does Dumbledore change categories in your mind?”

“There are some people who it is never safe to categorize. You never know when they might want to try and get a little boy’s knuts.”

“Hmm, well I suppose there is that.”

“Indeed.”

Wednesday morning Tonks dropped by Hermione’s place to show off a section of the day’s morning muggle news.

“He was in a wide open public place for three days. He used his own name here in London. And no one ever spotted him? Are people even trying to locate him anymore?”

Hermione’s brow furrowed. “Let me see that.”

New National Scrabble Champion Crowned

Harry Potter, of Little Whinging, Surrey, toughed his way through qualifying, and then all his tournament matches before reaching the finals of the Scrabble Nationals. In a bold daring move, he finished off his last opponent, Wentworth Conrad, by using his last five letters, and hitting the Triple Letter Score with an “X” in his winning word “phoenix.” A newbie to the Scrabble circuit, Mr. Potter was quickly a crowd favorite, who had a habit of making mocking words to insult and distract opponents. He was heard in a brief address to the crowd after receiving his championship belt as saying “I’d like to thank my Uncle Vernon, and his homosexual lover, Uncle Petunia. Thanks, in part to them, I got twice as much spelling and vocabulary work as any other student.”

“He didn’t even hide his scar, or his name! How did we miss this!” Hermione exclaimed.

“Same way we missed him every other time?” Tonks shrugged.

“Don’t get too down on me yet Tonky.” Hermione finished with a smirk.

Tonks whipped out her wand and pointed it at Hermione.

“Whoa! Whoa! I just said it to test you. Making sure you still got some fight left in you, old woman.”

“Old woman my arse. I’ll always have a teenage body. How’s the hips, Miss Pleasantly Plump?”

Hermione’s eyes started to tear up. “You...you think I’m fat?”

Tonks responded by smacking Hermione in the back of the head. “I’m not falling for that one. Some people need compliments and lots of reassurances. You can’t grow up Ron and Harry’s best friend and need that.”

Hermione shook herself. “Goodness tell me about it. If you look up ‘oblivious’ in the dictionary it has Ron’s floo address. And a sandwich for when I make him look it up again.”

“Anything good in the geek’s search last night? Since apparently Scrabble Nationals aren’t important enough for it.” Tonks inquired with a frown.

“Just one that I hadn’t heard that sounded like something he’d do.” Hermione said shaking her head.

Tonks liked the sound of this. “What’s that?”

“A few weeks back, someone stole the Mona Lisa from the Louvre. It’s the most heavily guarded object on public display. And it disappeared overnight.”

“As fun as it would be, Harry’s not exactly the purely thieving type.”

“The painting was discovered, complete with display, above a urinal in the men’s bathroom. Never left the museum it seems.”

“Oh, never mind then. Yeah, he’s a cheeky one.”

“I’m counting on some leads or ideas or something to come from tonight’s Order meeting.”

“Me too.” Hermione agreed. “In the meantime, how about we mail multiple copies of the Scrabble article to the Dursley’s?”

“Sounds good. I was planning on mailing it to their neighbors at least.”

CHAPTER FIVE

Tonks had just left to drop off copies of the article in the post, and now Hermione had an hour to kill before heading over to Grimmauld Place for the meeting. She decided she should be as prepared as possible, and fired up her geek-provided special search program. This time there was a new number one returned in the results.

“Paris Milton and Harry Potter XXX Sex Video 39.95? What on earth...” Hermione couldn’t believe the things on the internet these days.

Hermione looked down at her computer screen thoughtfully. “That can’t be right.”

Apparently she was starting an argument with her computer. “I mean Harry would never....”

The computer maintained its silence. “Would he?”

Hermione shook her head. “Now I’m just being silly.” The computer showed it was in agreement by maintaining its silence. “Must be some other Harry Potter,” she lied to herself.

The computer just stared back at Hermione. “Well, it does kind of sound like something Harry might do...and I really should follow up any leads, right?”

The computer gave Hermione no reassurances.

“Alright, fine.” Hermione had made a firm and well-reasoned decision.

“Click Here if you’re over 18...yes, yes, yes, I am...oh my!” A few unexpected windows popped up surprising Hermione.

“Oh good lord. CLOSE! No! Don’t open more windows!” The computer continued to spite Hermione.

“That is disgusting! Close! Close! Close! STOP! For the love of all that’s good!” The computer paid no mind to Hermione’s requests.

“Ewww! She is not 18! And neither is that horse! Close! Close! Close!”

The computer had figured out a trick it seems. Whenever you click to close a window, it could instead open three new windows, including one with the exact same page you just closed. “This is so wrong. Oh geez. 119 windows open? Oh dear. I really do not want to know if that was a picture of my neighbor’s wife.” The computer continued to mock Hermione in silence and more windows kept opening.

“Oh for Merlin’s sake, Stupefy!” Hermione exclaimed and stunned her computer. Apparently, the computer felt this was fighting dirty and responded by making some loud crunching sounds and emitted a puff of smoke.

“Not again.” Hermione whined to her no longer fighting back computer. “Reparo?” Hermione tried with no response. She thought quietly and tapped her upper lip with the tip of her wand. “Hmm...Ennervate?” Surprisingly, this worked. Well a little. The computer managed to power back up and turn on. After a few notes that were not terribly useful to the witch, Hermione spotted an all too familiar message. “INVALID SYSTEM DISK: NO KEYBOARD CONNECTED: (A)bort, (R)etry, (I)gnore?”

Oddly enough Hermione tried hitting “A”, “R”, and “I” on the keyboard multiple times before giving up when the obviously still upset computer made no response. “Oh geez that is the most useful error message I’ve ever seen.” Hermione could only shake her head in frustration.

She double-checked that she wasn’t dialed in, and got a little saddened when she remembered why she wasn’t. She picked up her telephone and dialed Memory 3. “Hi mom!”

“Hello Hermione. How are you doing?”

“Splendid. And have I ever mentioned how brilliant you are for getting extended warranties?”

“Again Hermione? This is the third time in less than two weeks.”

“Yes, yes. I know. I’m really not meaning to do this.”

“Didn’t your father warn you about those websites?”

“It wasn’t those! I ...oh never mind. Just please call it in.”

“Alright honey.”

“Gotta go. Thanks Mom. Love you.”

Hermione looked over at her still slightly smoldering computer. “I hate you Harry Potter.”

Hermione arrived into the kitchen of Number 12 Grimmauld Place to find it nearly full. It was mandatory for a few people Hermione knew, but she didn’t know if many others were going to show up. Well it seemed like there were quite a few here to discuss the Harry Hunt. Hermione walked over next to Tonks, who had saved her a seat in between her and Ron. They were giggling and laughing about something.

“Alright Hermione, I know you had to do more research so you could be even more prepared, so what ridiculous incredible new story do you have to share with us now?”

Hermione got a bit flustered, “I do not have to do more research.”

“If you just want to save it for the meeting, then say so. Don’t outright lie, Hermione.” Ron said with a disapproving frown.

“I’ll have you now I am not obliged or required to do more research than anyone else.” An indignant Hermione scolded her friend Ron.

“You blew it up again, didn’t you?” Tonks asked.

Hermione's anger couldn't hide her blush and an answer was not necessary. Ron and Tonks started laughing at her. "Hermione! That's like the third time in a week!"

"It's been almost two weeks!" Hermione corrected. "Err I mean....oh forget it."

"Let me guess. Porn windows?" Tonks asked with a smirk.

Hermione winced and nodded with her head down.

Ron's ears perked right up. "Porn windows? How do komptooters have windows? And of porn! Holy Canoli!"

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Ron! They're not-"

"Stop it! No Hermione. You are not going to ruin this for me. I want to think about a komptooter with magical windows. Now shush woman." A peaceful Ron said with his eyes scrunched closed and a wide smile on his face that was getting wider.

Hermione just goggled at her friend. Tonks was quietly snickering trying to imagine what on earth Ron must be thinking.

Albus Dumbledore arrived with Nicholas Flamel and called the meeting to order.

Dumbledore began, "Thank you all for coming. I want to start off right away by clearing any worries. There are no signs of any Dark threats, and today's meeting is not intended to be one to make anyone worry or to even remind you of the need for-"

"CONSTANT VIGILANCE!" Mad-Eye roared and a couple people jumped. Most members were still used to this.

"Yes. Thank you, Alastor, the need for vigilance. Merely it's been a year since we gathered officially and compared ideas or theories on the location of Mr. Potter. It also provides us an opportunity to improve our search due to the needs of Mr. Flamel.

“You may or may not have heard, but Professor Chaos has already tendered his resignation, and we once again need a DADA professor. I have pleaded with Nicholas, and he finally consented if we can help him out here today. Nicholas, perhaps you can better explain it?”

Professor Flamel nodded. “Thank you Albus. I know many of you have been struggling to help any in searches for Mr. Potter, and part of this reason is a side-effect of some secrecy oaths. Mr. Potter had several private tutors throughout his 6th and 7th years at Hogwarts, including myself, and he received secrecy oaths from us. I have since discovered, even though the primary reason was to keep knowledge of his skills and abilities from reaching the ears of Death Eaters or the Dark Lord, there also were secondary reasons. Including mainly keeping us all from realizing just how many skills and abilities he had, and how many private tutoring sessions he was actually receiving.

“Without indicating the nature of the lessons or even when and how often they met, I would like you to stand, if you are under a secrecy oath given under the guise of private tutelage, and you will see what I mean.”

Nicholas remained standing. Albus stood. And then so did Severus Snape, and Hermione Granger, followed by Auror Tonks, who stood up at the same time as Kingsley Shacklebolt. Mad-Eye Moody warily stepped forward since he never had sat down in the first place. Neville Longbottom was slightly unsure if he should stand or not but chose to stand. Remus Lupin got to his feet and looked over right as Minerva McGonagall stood up. An excited to be included Dobby jumped up onto the dining table and stood.

“I know of at least one wizard not in attendance today, and heard rumors of ‘others’ as well. Now, the situation has come to a point, where for a variety of reasons I cannot discuss, I am in need of being released from my original secrecy oath with Mr. Potter. Unfortunately, he layered all his tutors’ oaths within himself similarly, so an equal agreement between him and me is required to lift the spell for me, but in doing so, it would also lift the spell for all of you. As you may guess, this is unacceptable to Mr. Potter.

"I haggled with him a bit, and we have reached an accord though. It requires that I place a secrecy oath over all of us, and can bind it to this kitchen, but within these boundaries we can speak freely of any tutoring we may have given him. I have asked no one to leave, because I intend to leave this room free from the oath. People who you trust, who are not under the secrecy oath, may be brought into here and informed. I doubt this was Mr. Potter's intentions, but anything he doesn't specify clearly, I intend to take full advantage of.

"This is an all or nothing deal though. All of those standing must agree to the new oath, before I can have Harry release the old secrecy oaths. And I do not wish to influence anyone who prefers to keep their current oath, but if we are unable to do this, then I will not be able to take over the DADA position again. I unfortunately cannot explain it more in depth than that." Nicholas said finished with a frustrated look on his face.

A flurry of conversations started. Tonks yelled out, "Is there anyone who honestly would try and go against this? I cannot imagine anyone not wishing to be able to discuss this, if they didn't they would still go along with it and just keep quiet."

Albus smiled and Nicholas responded. "I would not imagine so, but me casting the larger blanket oath, does indeed require cooperation from the recipients, so we need to make the offer available. Not everyone involved may know me well enough or trust me with this."

Everyone standing had nodded looking at each other, though Severus looked to be bothered that the rotten Potter was getting even more attention through his absence.

"Excellent." Professor Flamel said. "Now I have here a cube that contains a triggered release of your current oaths. It will be triggered by my successful completion of a new oath, so please be aware you will feel two different spells washing over you."

Nicholas cast the oath, and the entire room became bathed in light that seemed to seep into the walls all around them. When it appeared the light had nearly gone away, the small cube that was hovering in front of Professor Flamel shot out several beams of crimson red light.

One each hit everyone standing, including some that flew upwards out the ceiling theoretically. Professor Dumbledore, Professor Flamel, Tonks, and Hermione all got hit by another red light. Professor Flamel then got hit a third time. And the cube then slowly lowered and rested on the ground inert.

“Excellent! I believe it all worked. But let us test it. Miss Tonks, why were you tutoring Mr. Potter?”

“He’s a bloody metamorphmagus!” Tonks blurted out and smiled to see she managed to say it. “Oh man I’ve been trying to say that one for a while.”

A few people looked a bit shocked, even though it should have been relatively obvious by now.

Hermione spoke up. “Professor Flamel, why did some of us get hit twice, and you, sir, get hit three times?”

“I was assuming that was because you were under more than one oath.” Nicholas responded.

Tonks shook her head. “I wasn’t.”

“Neither was I.” Hermione added.

Albus pursed his lips. “I was under two.”

Nicholas nodded. “And I was under three. Oh dear. I think Mr. Potter has done something else to this cube that I didn’t know about.”

Ron spoke up. “What is that cube anyway? I thought only Harry would have been able to release their oaths.”

“Well that’s what that was. Harry stored the release in the cube, and left it to be triggered by my successful completion of the new oath. It appears he snuck in something more for Miss Tonks and Miss Granger. Forgive me for a moment.” And Professor Flamel moved his chair right next to Albus’s as far away from the two girls in question as he could.

Seeing this response, everyone else moved back a bit too. Ron went over and stood next to Mad-Eye. He wanted to stand behind him, but Mad-Eye kept throwing curses over his shoulder at him.

Hermione looked over at her partner in exile. "Why does Harry do this to us? What have we done to him?"

Tonks was looking around the room. "I dunno Hermy. But he's somewhere. Laughing at us no doubt."

Apparently he wasn't alone though as Remus and Dobby were laughing at them too. An irritated Tonks exclaimed, "Oh fine, stay away you cowards. Anyways...speak up people. Who else tutored Harry and in what?"

They were all looking around at each other. Some of them seemed reluctant to betray any trusts Harry had placed in them.

"Look. Harry has made his disappearance into one gigantic game. Him versus everyone else in the world." Hermione tried to rally them together.

Remus was snickering. "Yeah and he's winning."

"Yes, he is. Thank you Remus, now stuff a skrewt in it please. And he's allowed us to talk here, so he intends for us to work together. He wants us to share his secrets. So I will start. Harry is an elemental and I helped train him in controlling the Air and the Fire elements. He was easily a master or a First Class by the end of 6th year. And halfway through 7th year we stopped because there wasn't anything he hadn't done that we could find."

Neville Longbottom stood up. "Harry helped me discover I was an Earth Elemental. We sort of learned about it together, even though he was always a step ahead of me."

Dobby raised his hand, and Albus kindly called on him to speak. "Master Harry was able to mimic House elf magic. Dobby taught Potty how to clean and how to pop."

“Potty?” an extremely amused Remus asked.

“When Master Harry, was doing house elf work, he was called Potty.” Dobby said with pride.

“And he lets you call him Master Harry? Last I heard he wouldn’t answer to you calling him Master.” Remus asked.

Dobby dropped his head shyly. “Master Harry finally allows it, because he calls Dobby, ‘Master Dobby’ in return.”

Remus just laughed and stood up. “I helped Harry learn first soundless magic, then wandless magic, then wand magic without sound or movements, and then thought magic. The closest thing to a hurdle was his thought magic is only as strong as an average wizard’s normal wand magic. As you can imagine the majority of it is simply unfair to the rest of us.”

The rest of the people there were beginning to understand why Harry would want to keep these things quiet. Every one of them but Remus would have written off things like wand magic without movements or thought magic as impossible.

Kingsley stood up and added “I tutored Mr. Potter in fitness, muggle fighting styles, and some limited martial arts.”

Moody stomped his peg leg and got people’s attention. “I trained him to track people and to move quietly and unnoticed. Maybe a few of the more destructive curses too.”

Minerva cleared her throat. “Over the course of 3 months in his 6th year, Mr. Potter learned the art of the animagus transformation. It should come with little surprise he in fact has multiple forms. I know he had become a lion, an eagle, a griffin, and a golden griffin before he continued his studies on his own. But considering it should be impossible for a metamorphmagus to complete the animagus transformation, I don’t think we should assume those are his only forms.”

Albus took his turn. "I tutored Harry frequently throughout 6th and 7th year in a wide variety of mental disciplines, including but not limited to: Occlumency, Legilimency, Telepathy, Empathy, and what I assumed was Telekinesis. Although now I realize it may have just been a manifestation of thought magic." Albus nodded towards Remus. "And in fairness, Mr. Potter's skill and discipline are off the charts. Though discipline barely feels like an accurate term to him, when it comes naturally. He can skim exterior thoughts with Legilimency, without needing eye contact, and I was unable to detect it. I also watched him just a couple days ago, win a Scrabble tournament. I sent out Legilimens probes and read the complete mind, thoughts, and history of a muggle named Harry Potter, who grew up with loving parents named James and Lily, and who now works for a fashion magazine dressing up models in lingerie." Albus stated with a twitch in his beard. "Were it anyone else, I would be certain it was a case of mistaken identity, as I could detect nothing in the slightest to indicate the man was magical, or that his thoughts were anything less than genuine. He did wink at me when he won the tournament though."

Hermione looked curious. "So if the Headmaster tutored him in Occlumency, what did you help him with Professor Snape?"

Severus scowled the nosy girl. He would enjoy this. "He begged me to teach him the Dark Arts."

A few members gasped. Molly Weasley looked horrified.

"Good lord people. His disposition is basically the opposite of what a good Dark Arts practitioner should be. I will reluctantly admit he did master them with relative ease, but I don't believe I ever saw him use any very questionable curses or hexes. But then again, I'm sure that's exactly what he wants us to think." Severus finished sarcastically.

Some muttering continued, and Severus thought it was simply done to irritate him.

"Professor Flamel?" Hermione asked.

He seemed a bit hesitant to answer. "I gave him an introduction to Alchemy."

A lot of people were surprised at that. They had assumed it was extra dueling, or DADA practice. Alchemy was not an art just anyone could do. And, if Professor Snape was to be trusted, Harry Potter was a horrible Potions student.

Nicholas continued. "And I am under other oaths, but I will add, I do have an ongoing project with Mr. Potter, and am in infrequent communication with him."

A number of people asked him a flurry of more questions and he just shook his head. He never even said "No" or "Don't ask", he simply shook his head, unable to say anything more.

Albus stood up and called for silence. "Please stop pestering my DADA professor. I knew this would happen, and he will remain in confidential communication with Mr. Potter. He cannot pass along any notes, or give him any messages, or anything of that sort. Or at least that was the closest thing to an answer I can derive from Nicholas's responses." Albus finished with a chuckle.

Professor Flamel smiled and nodded. "Thank you Albus. I too am curious exactly where he is at the moment, and like you, would prefer to see him back at Hogwarts. It would make many things much easier."

Hermione asked, "Did anyone else tutor Harry in anything?"

Bill Weasley spoke up, "We just had a few times where I taught him some Egyptian curses. Mainly a few hours when we could slip away over the holidays. Never needed an oath though."

Filius Flitwick added "I provided him with some study aids, and practiced dueling with him after class a number of times. I always assumed he was holding back."

Madame Pomphrey put in her two knuts. "Never had formal lessons or anything, but I gave him quite a few pointers during his weekly

hospital visits. Halfway through 7th year, the majority of the healing he could handle himself, and he wasn't dropping by weekly near as much. But when he did, it was usually a bit grisly."

Everyone else remained silent. Thinking about all the times they thought they had either seen or heard from Mr. Potter. No one seemed to have the first clue, except perhaps Professor Flamel, who was unable give them the first clue.

Surprisingly, it was Severus Snape who took the next step in the discovery portion of this meeting. "Raise your hand if you think you received a birthday gift or something similar from Mr. Potter."

Every person there raised their hand. And Severus plastered the snarkiest smirk he could all over his self-satisfied smitten face.

CHAPTER SIX

Hermione was shocked. "Everyone got something?"

All the heads in the room were looking at each other and nodding.

"But my gift sucked!" Hermione shrieked.

Several people were chuckling at her while others looked downright offended. Ron had been there when Hermione opened it, but in fairness, he is male. So Ron asked the question on everyone's mind. "What did he get you?"

Hermione realized how she had sounded and had the courtesy of looking a bit ashamed. "Sorry. I didn't mean it to come out like that. Umm, he got me an old, empty notebook. With a goofy looking lightning bolt on the leather binding. I'm assuming so I would look at it and think of the cheeky brat."

Nicholas raised an eyebrow. Albus's eyes widened and he leaned forward. "Was it red-stained leather and had a shield with a checkerboard pattern and the lightning over the shield?"

Hermione's eyes widened in response. "Yes it was. Oh dear, please tell me I was supposed to use it and fill it up like a normal notebook."

Nicholas's eyes nearly bulged out of there sockets. And Albus just started laughing out loud. Everyone else was looking at these three in confusion. Albus was just laughing and shaking his head at Hermione. Hermione was quite scared at the moment, while Nicholas couldn't contain his snickering very well. Albus finally managed to say, "My dear, from the sound of it, Mr. Potter managed to discover one of the Magical Tomes of Alexandria." He laughed a little more. "And you filled it out like a grocery list." His laughter at the situation seemed to be never-ending.

Hermione went pale and looked like she was going to throw up. "I did fill it out with my grocery list!" Nicholas began laughing out loud too

now, and the people who were familiar with the Magical Tomes of Alexandria were cracking up.

Albus's eyes were twinkling like crazy. "Miss Granger, would you mind sharing what you know of the Magical Tomes of Alexandria with the rest of the people still confused."

"The short version," Ron and Tonks both said at the same time. Remus laughed even louder than he had been when the two spoke in unison.

Hermione frowned at the pair and explained, "The Magical Tomes of Alexandria were a wizarding copy of the Library of Alexandria. They were linked to an information store that contained all of the works within the actual library. In addition to containing many ancient wizarding books, anyone with a tome could use it to call up any of the books within the information store and it would fill out the pages. In addition, when blank it could be used to write or copy books into, and submit them to the information store." Hermione winced visibly. "And I'm pretty sure I accidentally submitted a few grocery lists as well. Oh my goodness."

Pretty much everyone knew Hermione's opinions of books and how sacrilegious this situation was to her. So they all relished in laughing and snickering at her pain.

"Supposedly they only created ten linked tomes. Though it was rumored all had been destroyed as none have surfaced in centuries. Oh crikey Harry." Hermione just sat down quietly, and began to slowly bang her head onto the table.

"Well that sounds like a pretty remarkable gift you received Miss Granger. I myself received an absolutely wonderful never ending lemon drop dish. At least I assume it is never ending. I have over two dozen extra large size cauldrons hidden in a closet filled to the brim that seem to indicate it is never ending." Albus said with a smile.

Severus added with a frown. "I wondered where those cauldrons went. I think I blamed some Gryffindors and took some points from them for that."

Albus pursed his lips. "I'm beginning to understand Dobby better. He told me they were being wasted where they had been before. I interpreted that as not being in use. I think he may lack respect for many of your students' Potion making skills." Albus finished with a twitching upper lip.

Dobby smiled and shrugged.

Albus didn't want to let his Potions Master get too angry so he quickly added, "And Harry also got me three wonderful pairs of warm woolly socks on my birthday. What about you Severus? What did you receive?"

Severus decided to allow the change of direction and said, "I received a very impressive collection of rare potions ingredients. Including a mysterious black liquid in a vial, I cannot open yet. The card informed me, I would like the substance and to wait until I was told the password to open it." Severus was carefully watching Professor Flamel while he said this and definitely noticed a flicker of recognition at the mention of a mysterious black liquid.

Severus turned his attention clearly to Nicholas. "Any idea what the liquid is Professor? Or perhaps what the password is?"

Nicholas just smiled. "Come now Professor Snape, if what you suspect were true then you know I wouldn't be able to tell you anyway." Severus just smirked, while everyone else looked on in confusion.

Ron asked, "What the heck is going on?"

Severus looked at Professor Flamel. "Any objections, Professor?"

Albus had figured out what was happening and was quite eager to hear more about this liquid. Nicholas nodded his head, "By all means please share your theories and be aware I will not be able to confirm nor deny."

Severus looked around to the crowd. "I believe Professor Flamel is involved in another significant project similar to the one he was in about a century ago with the Headmaster."

Hermione caught on to where he was going. "You mean Professor Flamel and this time, Harry instead of the Headmaster, are developing more magical uses for dragon's blood?"

Severus smiled. There are few greater joys in the world than correcting Miss Granger. "No Miss Granger. The Headmaster and Professor Flamel's project was because it was the first time we had controlled dragon's enough to be able to withdraw blood safely. This was why they needed to determine its magical properties and uses as soon as possible. I believe Professor Flamel and Mr. Potter have discovered or come across some new magical substance that they are needing to develop and determine uses for. And I believe Mr. Potter even gave me a sample of this new substance and it is the black liquid I cannot identify."

Albus nodded, "I must concur with you Severus, but this is definitely news to me, and I know we will only make things more difficult on Nicholas if we discuss it in front of him. Before we move on," Albus turned to Nicholas, "I wonder if it would be safe to ask if you think that if there were such a discovery, then would it have more or less impact on our lives than did dragon's blood?"

Nicholas smiled and took a deep breath. "Definitely...more. And on a lovely return to our subject of discussion, I received a mood ring and a muggle DVD from Mr. Potter on my birthday. Who else received something they would like to share?"

It seemed there were a lot of people wanting to continue the conversation about this discovery but they all respected Professor Flamel too much to push it. Kingsley Shacklebolt raised his voice to get people's attention. "I've got a birthday story I doubt you've heard. For my birthday," Kingsley explained "I got tickets to this muggle dueling battle. It was called World Super Ultimate Extreme Fighting Challenge. It was in Monaco, and they lock fighters in cages until one is unconscious or yields. It was pretty scary. Those guys were out to win and would fight dirty to do it. The last exhibition match was some

title bout. One of the fighters was called The Deathdealer.” Kingsley started shaking his head with visible disbelief. “His opponent was The Boy-Who-Rules!”

The rest of the Order was listening with baited breath, and a few of them were snickering at Harry’s alleged nickname. Kingsley continued calmly and quietly, “The Deathdealer was huge. Like seven feet tall solid muscle. But The Boy was just too fast and vicious for him. Any time The Deathdealer got close, The Boy was able to dodge and just lay into him. A few spectators in the crowd were yelling ‘Give him the Prongs!’ Eventually almost the entire stadium was chanting ‘Prongs! Prongs! Prongs!’ The Boy did this move where he ran straight at The Deathdealer, slid between The Deathdealer’s legs, and punched him forcefully in the soft tissue halfway through the slide. In one swift motion he then leapt to his feet and ran halfway up the cage wall before kicking off it and back-flipping to land on The Deathdealer’s back and shoulders. He followed through with his momentum grabbed The Deathdealer’s head, squeezing him under the ears, and flipped him over his own head, straight through the air at least twenty feet away and a good fifteen feet up the cage wall. Whole maneuver took like three seconds. It was the craziest thing I have ever seen.”

Kingsley’s eyes were wide when he finished recounting the event, and he was just slowly shaking his head. “I pity the fool that messes with him.”

The Order was aware Harry could take care of himself, but none of them suspected he was that good without magic.

Dobby stood back up on the table and raised his hand. The Headmaster smiled and called on Dobby. “Master Harry got Dobby a Sit’n’Spin for Dobby’s birthday!”

Several people started giggling at that. Ron spoke up, “Hey I remember that! You were missing for two days and no one could find you. Finally Winky located you, and you were still spinning though you had passed out it seemed. When she woke you was the first time I saw a house elf puke!” Ron finished in fond remembrance of the day.

Dobby smiled and nodded vigorously. "It's almost as good as freedom!" The rest of the order was now cracking up with the excitable elf.

Hestia Jones stood up and said, "I don't know how many of you heard about this one yet, but over last spring I had been dating Jimmy Garbanzo, he's a reserve chaser for Puddlemere United. Well, about a week before my birthday, he dumped me, in a particularly vindictive and public manner. I wasn't exactly pleased to say the least." You could see that even today she held on a little bit of her anger. "Anyways, the day before my birthday, he was at practice, and from what I hear, was just flying normally about twenty feet up when his lucky broom, which he was riding, completely disappeared from existence. He fell and broke his wrist in such a way he had to wait for it to heal the muggle way. And naturally the next day, I received a birthday gift with a bow on it. It was his broom. And a pack of matches." She finished with a smile.

Ron was appalled. That's a professional broom! "You didn't burn it, did you?"

Hestia shook her head. "It took a lot of effort, but I didn't destroy it. I eventually returned it anonymously." Several people looked a bit disappointed. "Of course I did have a masked testicle biting hex charmed into the handle." Many people started laughing at that, though more than a few males winced and hissed.

Mad-Eye Moody quickly threw out, "I got a new flask. It's completely tamperproof, and anyone who touches it other than me turns a wicked blue for two weeks." Minerva added, "I received some lovely Griffin and Snitch earrings. They're my quidditch good luck charms."

Ron spoke up, "On my birthday was when Chudley called to me offer the keeper tryout. They told me, it was just a straight-up tryout. No guarantees about a job or anything. Sometimes I wonder though, but now it doesn't really matter. I got the Assistant Coaching Job on my own, and that I am certain of." A chorus of Weasley's cheered for their brother.

George and Fred took their turn, "We know it's not exactly coincidence"

"that on our birthday," George said.

"April Fools Day for those writing it down." Fred continued.

"Zonko decided to retire" George began.

"and sell us his business." Fred finished.

"Though we wouldn't accept until the day was over." George explained.

"Zonko pranked us by not actually pranking us." Fred said shaking his head.

"Cheeky bugger." They finished in unison.

Fleur stood up, and so did Bill. Thankfully, after three years, Fleur's English was nearly perfect and her accent only showed when she got emotional. "My gift was the kind you can never thank them properly for or repay. No one knew this but Bill and I. About two years ago in the battle of Diagon Alley, I was cursed quite viciously. I needed to heal, and had to take Skele-Gro to regrow my left hip."

Mrs. Weasley was sniffing. "I remember that dear. I hate seeing my children hurt."

"Yes Mother, but what we never told you was that I was severely damaged internally. I was never going to be able to have children." Fleur was sniffing at the memories. Molly Weasley gasped and restrained herself from hugging her daughter-in-law.

"And well, on my eve of my birthday, I fell asleep in William's arms as always, but I woke up downstairs on the couch. There on the coffee table waz...wuz..." And Fleur couldn't stop the tears from coming. Bill squeezed her shoulder and finished for her. "It was a baby rattle with a bow on it." Bill just shook his head. "And a Harry Potter action figure."

Ginny yelled. "He stole that from me!" She quickly realized this wasn't the most opportune time to yell that out. "Sorry."

Bill smiled and shook his head. "Anyways, I guess now is as good a time as any, but-"

"I'mz seecks weeks pregnant!" An overjoyed Fleur exclaimed.

Molly Weasley shrieked "Grandchildren! GRANDCHILDREN!" before she began convulsing and small bursts of electricity were jumping off her head. Arthur quickly grabbed his wife and forced a calming draft down her throat. She sagged briefly in his arms before jumping up and squealing with glee. She hurdled over the kitchen table and hugged Bill and Fleur to the point where people had to remind her of the baby.

Fred stood up. "While we're making announcements and stuff, I suppose you should know that...umm"

George finished, "We've got one coming on the way too."

Molly snapped her attention to the unmarried twins. "What! A baby!"

Fred and George both winced and nodded.

Arthur just went white. "Oh my. Whose is it? Katie? Angelina?"

Fred raised his hand, "It's mine. Well, I guess officially George's and mine."

The entire Order all stared in horror at the Weasley twins.

George began to defend them, "There was this problem. We were working on a new sweet, to emulate the effects of carrying and birthing a baby, and well, Fred took the first attempt, and it did not work as we expected."

Fred used his hands to try to calm them, "We've discontinued our work on it! It will not be happening again, but as it is now I can

already feel the little guy kicking,” Fred said while rubbing and sticking out his belly.

Madame Pomphrey shook her head while everyone else still just stared at the pair in fright. “Come here you idiot!”

Fred walked over to her, and she cast several revealing spells on Fred and particularly Fred’s stomach. With each successive spell her eyes went wider and wider. “How the heck did you do that!”

Fred looked over at George. “I told you it was a baby!”

Madame Pomphrey rolled her eyes and shook her head at the morons. “It’s not a baby you nincompoop.”

Fred looked heartbroken until she added, “It’s a puppy.”

Fred and George both smiled like Christmas just came early. They hugged each other with smiles and tears in their eyes. The rest of the Order was still in shock staring at the sheer idiocy of the powers of creation in the hands of these two.

Fred and George looked into each other’s eyes and said “Padfoot” at the same time.

Remus then burst out into tears laughing at them. “You two are scarier than Voldemort.” And by now no one flinched at the name anymore.

Hagrid stood up and said, “On my birthday, I got visited by two of the most beautiful dragons you’ll ever see. The larger ice blue one talked to me in my head. He told me the other was Norbert! And Norbert wanted to come see me and wish me a Happy Birthday.” Hagrid was sniffing. “Norbert remembered me! He came right up to me and let me pet him. The other fellow was there to translate for us.”

Charlie Weasley smiled. “I remember that dragon too. He talked to me at the reserve and introduced me to all the dragons. Now I’m their favorite. He said his name was Draco, but I refused to call him that.

We settled on Drake. Haven't seen him since that one day. Still not sure if that was Harry or not."

Minerva, Tonks, and Hermione all said, "It was." They then all smiled at each other and rolled their eyes.

Remus let out a small sigh and sat back. "On my birthday I got visited by a Drow named Carl."

Several people exclaimed "What!" A few said "Drow are real?" And Severus exclaimed "Carl's a Drow!"

Remus looked at them all bemused. "Yes, yes, and yes. He said we had a mutual friend, and it's not exactly hard to guess who that is. Unless of course, you count me as a friend Severus?"

Snape just curled his lip and growled at him.

Remus snickered. "Right. Anyway, he taught me a lot more about what being a werewolf is and means. I'm not a full-fledged Lycan yet, but I'm a lot closer. Moony and I accept each other. I've even drawn him out safely during the day, and was able to reassert normal control when I wanted to. It's been three months since I felt any pain during the full moon."

Albus smiled brightly, "That is wonderful Remus. I do hope you plan to write a book."

Remus blushed and nodded.

Nicholas suggested, "Perhaps Miss Granger brought her grocery list and could get you some ancient research on Lycans." Everyone got a giggle out of that, particularly when Hermione started banging her head on the table some more.

Tonks frowned a bit and spoke up. "Cheeky bugger pranked me. At least I think he did. I honestly have no idea what to think of my gift." Hermione and Ginny both started snickering like crazy attracting a few stares and a scowl from Tonks. Hermione spoke up, "Come on Tonks, tell us about Spot."

Tonks harrumphed but told anyway. "On my birthday I received a magical alarm clock. It was a full size Dalmatian dog with a clock and a couple dials on the back of his head. You choose the time you want to wake up, and the method. It could just beep a horrible buzzer, play the Wizarding Wireless Network, or the most popular option, lick you awake. So instead of waking to an annoying buzzing or loud noise, a happy dog would lick your face until you got up. Or if you're not down with the slobber in your face, you can have it lick your hand, or wherever else you prefer."

A number of people were laughing at the unconscious blush Tonks was getting trying to subtly explain the capabilities of her new alarm clock.

"Anyways, I'd had Spot for almost two weeks, and one morning, he woke me up the usual way," Tonks had to pause until she could be heard over people's laughter. "And well, once I was up, Spot looked me in the eye, barked for the first time ever, and jumped out the window." Everyone was laughing at the confused auror now.

She just shrugged and said, "Never saw him again."

Ginny smirked, "And why did you name him Spot?"

"Shut it woman. He was a Dalmatian. I shouldn't have to explain that one." She stated angrily still fighting another blush.

Neville added, "I couldn't even begin to explain it, but on my birthday I received a healthy living Moonflower Daisy. I honestly didn't think they were real, and I talked to my element. They don't exist on Earth, so..." Neville just shrugged. "You think maybe he can apparate to the moon?"

Hermione exclaimed "Don't be ridiculous Neville, he... enh, well, maybe." Hermione forgot she can't apply rules to Harry.

Hermione added, "You know he used to go grocery shopping with me. Maybe that's why I thought the notebook was for my grocery lists. Anyways, one time I got home and I knew I had forgotten peanut

butter and mayonnaise. Ron kept making those awful sandwiches.” She shook her head, “As I was saying, when I unpacked my groceries, I discovered in my bags peanut butter and mayonnaise. I usually buy the generics, and these were name brands, so I know it wasn’t me.”

“Next time I went grocery shopping, I intentionally forgot orange juice, and once again it magically appeared in my groceries. The third time I went, I intentionally forgot to get tampons and pickles. I didn’t get them, but they had been circled, high-lighted and had a frowny face next to them on my shopping list. Now I always intentionally forget at least one item. Brat never gets them for me anymore.”

Tonks suggested “Maybe because you’ve been writing in a priceless artifact?”

Hermione was really beginning to think she had been confounded by Harry.

Ginny spoke up. “He got me a muggle diary. He assured me it was completely impenetrable from all magic, but that next time I see him, if I want he can allow it to only respond to my magic. And of course many of you remember Zach Smith.” She got an evil smirk. “He came into the store nearly naked and was bright blue and wearing an oversized white diaper. He told me he had cheated on me twice, said he would never be good enough for me, and gave me a Wizard’s Oath to never talk to me again.”

Remus was snickering. “Tonks called him the Huffallepuffallesmurf. That kills me every time.” Remus finished with tears in his eyes.

A calmer Molly Weasley stood up. “Most of you know this, but the Burrow has been magically repairing itself, from what we can tell. Rooms have been slowly getting bigger, structures more secure, corners are cleaner...”

Arthur added in “And don’t forget the morning we came out and the gnomes were weeding the garden for you.”

Molly rolled her eyes at that one. "Insufferable twerp. And the worst of all was he gave us a lot of money. He claimed it was for room and board. Cheeky brat won't take it back. When we tried to get the Goblins to take it back, they had been instructed to give us more."

Arthur smiled and shrugged.

Molly looked a bit frustrated. "That boy really needs a hug." She nodded her head. "And a good spanking."

Tonks, Hermione, and Ginny all wholeheartedly agreed.

CHAPTER SEVEN

“Sorry to burst your bubble but I think perhaps spanking him is more likely to fulfill one of his many extremely perverted fantasies than it is to scold him.” Nicholas Flamel said with a chuckle.

“We never said we were trying to scold him.” Ginny blurted out before she realized it what she had said and then blushed so hard she made herself dizzy. She went from looking like a cute embarrassed young witch into looking like a cute embarrassed pulsing blood blister. Oddly enough, Severus Snape was one of the first to crack and break out into loud laughter. This triggered similar loud laughter from Nicholas Flamel. Dumbledore was too polite to laugh at the young witch. Or more likely he simply wasn't listening and instead was smelling the colors in his head. The rest of the Order all stopped dead and quietly stared at a former Death Eater laughing for the first time in their presence. It sounded like a normal pleasant man's laugh. And that scared them more than anything else could.

Fred whimpered and clutched his arms protectively around his womb and the puppy inside it. Neville Longbottom was fighting an uphill battle desperately hoping to prevent wetting himself. Severus noticed the reaction he got, and in his head he was doing a happy dance of joy while a little part of young Sevvie was crying in a corner. He stopped laughing and yelled out. “Oh for Merlin's sake people, I can laugh. And you wouldn't know this, but I have had my Dark Mark removed and modified and it has had some negative side effects on my personality. I am now corrupted by the occasional feeling.”

Nicholas and Albus were both snickering at the former spy.

“Unless I can get some new potion to correct this I am stuck having to suffer through the odd smile and somewhat rarer snicker. When it's really acting up I even sometimes nod and agree.” Severus exhaled a loud exasperated sigh.

Severus saw this bit of sarcasm did not have the intended effect and they were all still staring at him in shock. When in doubt, blame the incorrigible rotten twit. “I really hate you Harry Potter.” Severus said moments before jumping up out of his seat. Staring down at his left

bicep with his eyes wide in shock, Severus began smacking himself in the arm. "Ohh good gravy. Stop that Potter!" He kept beating himself on the arm briefly contemplating where he was in life now and comparing his three masters. "Yield. Uncle. I give. For the love of Potions, Potter! Stop! St-...oh thank Merlin."

Apparently the sensation Severus was receiving on what only he knew was his phoenix tattoo, had finally stopped. He seemed to be calming down and briefly noticed Nicholas and Albus had genuinely concerned looks on their faces now. And the rest of the Order didn't appear to have even moved a muscle from their last stares of horror.

"Useless rotten brat." Severus finished with one more quick smack on his arm.

Nicholas snickered a little and said. "I think we all could go a while longer sharing stories of the alleged eccentricities of Mr. Potter, but unless anyone else has something useful to the searching I think I might be ready to call it a night. Don't let this old man's need for a solid eight hours keep you all from continuing your discussion though."

Albus smiled. "I agree with Nicholas. I was thinking perhaps we could designate a couple people as leads in the Harry-hunting."

A few people nodded and no one else spoke up.

Albus continued. "Very well then. Nicholas, would you be willing to help us locate Mr. Potter?"

Nicholas smiled and nodded. "I am in the unique position most likely to track down The-Boy-Who's-Cheeky, but it's also likely that I will not be able to aid you at all in the process. I was thinking Miss Granger-oh excuse me, Professor Granger. I forget we are colleagues now. Last time I was teaching you were a student, and I've only been a professor again for a couple hours now. Professor Granger, I was hoping you could collect and gather the evidence, as you know him as well as anyone. And I can assist you in perhaps some generic scrying techniques as well as contribute information that I am able to. Though I do not know how much help I would be working on the

ladybug.” Nicholas turned to the rest of the Order. “But then having the Professor sharing her findings with me, and I can figure out a way to throw a leash on him. I’m going to have to request that we not kill my research partner, even if he is blackmailing me. But a few spankings, noogies, and perhaps painful retaliatory pranks would definitely be in order.”

There were a number of people chuckling and a few with hungry looks in their eyes. Though you had to wonder about Ginny’s for sure.

Hermione agreed. “I think that would be excellent, Professor Flamel. I’m beginning to think we could have an open connection to him in Severus maybe.”

Severus pleaded. “Please don’t incite his wrath until we’ve got the thing caged.” A snarl from the greasy man and a slap on his bicep followed.

The Weasley twins got evil gleams in their eyes but weren’t about to risk anything with a puppy on the way.

Albus stood up. “Very well then. Consider this meeting adjourned. Severus, if you wouldn’t mind I would like to speak with you in my office.”

Conversations started up all over while many people got up and began filing out of the kitchen at Number Twelve Grimmauld Place.

Nicholas called out. “Mr. Longbottom. A word please.”

Neville smiled. “Sure. What’s up, Professor?”

“How is your Moonflower Daisy?”

“Oh, it’s great. I’ve split it, constructed an environment for it, gotten it germinated and blooming, and harvested some pollen, leaves, stem, and petals.”

“Excellent. You truly are a skilled herbologist. Although some might consider the elemental control cheating. Tell me have you plans for the ingredients in any potions?”

Neville shook his head. “No. I don’t think I know any potions that would need an ingredient that was only rumored to exist.”

“Ahh. Tell me, have you ever heard of the Kiss of Ra?”

Neville frowned and shook his head.

“It is an ancient Egyptian potion. Its intent was to cure madness. Very difficult to make, and I know nothing of its ingredients or if it even worked.”

Neville looked at the Professor very curiously.

“I wouldn’t want to give you any false hope, but I believe Mr. Potter may have been doing more with his gifts than we initially imagined. I find it quite convenient that you receive some rare mythological ingredient, and at the same time Professor Granger, once she cleans and fixes her priceless artifact, receives a huge store of ancient information and Professor Snape receives an impressive collection of rare and valuable potion ingredients. I expect the cheeky one was setting you and Hermione up to try and overcome your own fears and then befriend Professor Snape. At the same time, offering you an unexplored alternative to perhaps regaining your parent’s health.”

Neville’s eyes were wide at the implications.

Nicholas noticed he seemed to be slow in responding. “I could be completely off base here. But there is no denying he has been far more devious and forward thinking than we expected of him. I feel like we’re all parents and our teenager is somewhere in between loving us, hating us, and rebelling for the sake of rebellion. I’ve been around a while and the boy perturbs me like no one else has.”

Neville smiled. “I think he’s just having a spot of fun, Professor. And I really think you’re right about the gifts. I’m going to talk to Hermione about potions or information on Moonflower Daisies. If, we find

anything useful to a potion, I'll ask for Professor Snape's help. But could you do me a favor, Professor?"

Nicholas looked intrigued. "What's that, Mr. Longbottom?"

"If Hermione can't escort me, could you come with me? He's really scary." Neville said nodding his head with wide eyes. "Although a bit more freakish lately."

Nicholas rolled his eyes. "He really is a different man without the taint of the Dark Mark. You need not forget his past grievances, to still appreciate and know the man he is now. He is not a man with an overabundance of friends. He had to spend twenty years lying to the people who thought he was their friend, and unable to cultivate any friendships or genuine relationships of his own. With the exception of Albus which is not unlike reaching into a box of cheerios and pulling out a fruit loop."

Neville smiled at his favorite DADA professor. "No offense sir, but you're a crunchberry in a box of count chacula yourself."

Nicholas's lips twitched. "Thank you. I think."

"You're welcome, Professor. I think." Neville said and walked over to talk to Hermione. A few brief words and she moved towards the wall to bang her head a bit.

Albus was sitting calmly behind his desk. He knew he needed some privacy for this conversation and had Severus meet with him in his Headmaster's office. "A couple of things I wished to discuss with you Severus. First, I was curious how your meeting with Mr. Malfoy went?"

"It was informative." Severus settled in and prepared his mind for a discussion with the Headmaster. "I believe we have no need for worries from Mr. Malfoy."

"That is good news. Can I ask how you came to that conclusion?" the Headmaster inquired.

“Understand you must keep this in the strictest of confidences. He was as faithful a Death Eater as I was. He just finds you a bit too barmy to trust. An argument I have trouble refuting.”

“Oh shush child.” Albus responded. “So Mr. Potter had his own personal spy in the Tom’s Inner Circle?”

“It appears that way. Before he left he modified and removed the Dark Mark from Draco’s arm as well. The arrogant little git has a cool moving dragon on his arm.” Severus pouted.

“And Harry’s trust in him is worth enough to you?”

“You’re really pushing the ‘barmy’ these days aren’t you?” Severus smiled while Albus frowned. “No, I would not assume Potter knows best. But Draco’s actions seem more legitimate when you can recognize the caring and kindness hidden in his motives. Draco’s even been helping keep an eye on the Slytherins.”

Albus smiled at that.

Severus continued. “He claims it is solely for his own profit, and to improve the public image of Slytherins. I think he might even be successfully lying to himself about that. And of course, being a marked follower of the Light Lord Potter probably affects his disposition more than he would be willing to admit.”

Albus shook his head. “The Light Lord Potter. Does that mean I get to be his right hand man?”

“You have been known to torture your servants with lemon drops.”

Albus responded with a stare. “Has Mr. Malfoy been in contact with Harry?”

“Not since he disappeared. Though Mr. Potter apparently allowed Mr. Malfoy to act as bait and attract many of the remaining loyal Death Eaters. He apparated to Draco’s location and saved his life a half dozen times by Mr. Malfoy’s estimations.”

“That makes sense. Do you know any of Mr. Malfoy’s future plans?”

“I was wondering if you would be willing to accept him here now that you should feel safer in his motivation. I was hoping to offer him an apprenticeship and insuring he receives a Mastership in Potions. He would also represent another link to Mr. Potter.”

“Not to mention probably take over half of your duties.”

Severus face remained impassive. “He related one of his last discussions with Mr. Potter. Apparently Mr. Potter said that I am your pet reform project, and Mr. Potter is afraid that Draco is going to be seen as his.”

“Why Severus I wouldn’t think you’d be able to say something like that without a severe frown! Does my little Snapie want a biscuit? That’s a good little Snapie.”

Severus scowled. “Oh for Merlin’s sake. I just want someone here who won’t recoil in horror if I start to laugh.”

Albus smiled and leaned back. “Severus, don’t be afraid to use the ‘F’ word. Now try again.”

Severus took a deep breath and tried exhale his rage. “I would like a friend here. One that doesn’t torture me into using disgusting Gryffindor language.”

“See that wasn’t so bad! I think it is a wonderful idea. I’d be happy to set up Draco with his own quarters next yours, and if you prefer to split your duties we could make Draco an official Assistant Professor of Potions.”

Severus was fighting some vile taste in his mouth. He bitterly spat out, “Thank you Headmaster.”

“Such kindness and caring is music to my ears. You’re welcome, Severus. Now I was also wondering about this mysterious black liquid. Did you perchance bring it with you?”

Severus took out the source of much of his recent frustration. That is to say he took out the vial of black liquid from his pocket. He did not kill the Headmaster. "I've not been able to open it, and now I'm even less inclined to try and blast the thing open. I'd be curious to hear any theories on it you may have." Severus said handing the vial to the Headmaster.

Albus was holding it up to the light and examining it as well as he could through his mage senses. "This substance is highly magical and potent. But I do not think I've ever seen anything like it. I'd assume it is something naturally occurring but I haven't a clue."

Severus frowned. "I can only assume that the cheeky one is the only person who can get this material. Or else Professor Flamel's choice in research partners is sadly lacking. The brat was barely average in potions and never put any effort into it."

"Why Severus, that green with envy you're wearing clashes with your Slytherin green horribly." Albus said with a smile at the severe frown he was receiving. "And if you're calling Mr. Potter barely average, I assume he must have beaten out Miss Granger for the top score on Potions NEWTs the year before last."

"Draco beat her too!" he exclaimed indignantly.

"And apparently came in second to Mr. Potter." Albus's eyes were twinkling up a storm.

"Oh like you didn't use your influence to find out his NEWTs."

"You know me too well my friend. Although even you might appreciate the fact that he took the Divinations NEWT and managed to get every question wrong. A perfect zero, since he even spelled his name incorrectly: Hairy Potty."

Severus was fighting a chuckle. Trelawney was still recovering from Mr. Potter's seventh year. "Even you must admit both you and I would make better research partners."

“I spent several years on my own work with dragon’s blood, and you may have other things to work on. Considering, you may be one of only three in the world with this substance you will most likely get to do something. And perhaps some powerful new potions requests are going to be coming your way. Surely, you recognize that there will be a Magical Tome of Alexandria at Hogwarts. I believe I overheard Nicholas mentioning the Kiss of Ra to Mr. Longbottom.”

Severus eyes lit up forgetting the discovery of the ancient tome. And he was frustrated to feel jealousy for the second time in a matter of minutes. “So what do you think the black liquid is?”

Albus pensively frowned. “Given the fact that it appears he has access to things not of this earth, it could be anything. My first guess upon hearing of the project and Nicholas’s involvement would have been some creature’s blood or bodily fluid. But upon examining it, I cannot think of any beings that would contain so thick, dark, and potent a substance. I doubt we will be able to tell anything until we’re informed, or perhaps you guess the password and we can take a closer look at it.”

Severus shook his head. “I’m wondering if there really is a password or if he’s just toying with me.” Severus’s eyes widened. “Cheeky brat probably made it a parseltongue password.”

Albus just snickered at his Potions professor. “And the cheeky brat apparently has some control over your phoenix mark. Tell me, was he really sending you pain along it earlier?”

Severus sighed and shook his head. “Yes he apparently can be aware of surroundings to a degree...” Severus paused and began quickly thinking. “Unless he was at the meeting tonight.”

Albus’s eyes began twinkling even more. “I was also wondering if it would be safe to draw that conclusion.”

They both sat back in thought occasionally meeting each other’s eyes. Severus shook himself a bit and added, “Anyways, no he wasn’t sending me pain. He was using the mark to send sharp bursts of

extreme pleasure.” Severus’s voice ended a tinge of disgust.

Albus snorted as quietly as he could. “I do hope Lucy won’t be jealous.”

Severus narrowed his eyes in confusion. “Who’s Lucy?”

Albus pondered whether to continue this line of discussion or not. He’d lived long enough he figured and plunged forward. “I was under the impression the property returned to you from Mr. Ollivander was named Lucy.”

Severus gagged. “Oh lord and ewww. Lucy? And you thought that was mine? Oh I’m going to kill the rotten twerp!” Severus exclaimed and quickly slapped his arm with a “Yeowch!”

Albus looked mollified and was still snickering. “You might need to be careful on what things you think or speak aloud about the young Light Lord. I fear there are a number of people who believe Lucy was in fact your property.”

“Oh I intend to get a little retaliation in during the school year. Perhaps you would care to assist when the time comes.”

Albus nodded and smiled. “I would be delighted. Please keep me informed if you have any luck or theories on your liquid. You know how I dislike being uninformed.”

“Of course Headmaster. Good evening. I will speak to Mr. Malfoy tomorrow.”

“Good night Severus.”

Vernon Dursley loved to mow his lawn on Saturday’s. The late afternoon, as the sun starts setting is ideal. The midday sun can be too overpowering, and who wants to wake up early on a Saturday. He always had the little brat do the mowing when he was around, but once he started mowing himself, he never realized what a simple enjoyable pleasure it was. And for the thirteenth Saturday in a row, he walked out to the shed to get his mower. When he turned around, he

noticed the entire lawn was perfect and must have been mowed within the last couple hours.

“Why on earth does this keep happening?” The angry rotund man exclaimed.

For some strange reason, he only now remembered that this exact situation happened last weekend. And the weekend before that. And the one before that too. And now the rest of his weekend had been ruined. Again. He was extremely angry. But he wouldn't let that interfere with his refreshing beverage and cool down time after a hard day's work in the yard. He walked back inside, handed the post to his gossipy wife, and grabbed himself a nice cool beer. He turned on the fan and sat down in front of the telly and turned on the news.

Petunia shrieked loud enough to wake the dead. “Vernon!” She screamed at the news clipping she just received.

“What is it honey bunny?”

The horse faced sister of Lily Evans began hyperventilating and handed the article to her husband. He harrumphed and began mumbling as he quickly scanned the article. “Potter... scrabble... Homo-what-tual lover Uncle Petunia!” was all he managed to say coherently before he fell into a series of random grumblings and barkings.

His gruff angry barks were interrupted by his wife shrieking again and pointing at the newscaster. Vernon turned his head and caught the tail end of his report.

“...the local policemen assured us. They initially had a team of ten men trying to push the beached whale back into the sea and were unable to budge it. The construction crane levered with solid steel pulleys was able to roll over the beast. They were all shocked to discover it was not in fact a beached whale, but Little Whinging resident, Dudley Dursley. The now identified ‘man’ apparently was severely intoxicated and had managed to strip naked and passed out on the public beach some time in the early morning.”

The report cut to a wildlife ranger. "I could tell it wasn't no whale soon as we rolled him over. There ain't any species of whale with genitalia that small."

Cutting back to the newscaster, the report concluded. "Dudley Dursley is being held for public intoxication, indecent exposure, and resisting arrest. The construction company who loaned the crane will be seeking civil reparations to cover the costs of damages done to the crane. Back to you, Stan."

The lead anchorman continued and began a report on illegal amateur pornography for sale on the internet. Petunia and Vernon Dursley were in shock. They finally realized their ickle sweet Dudley was in jail and they needed to go bail him out. Petunia grabbed her purse and Vernon had to stop his relaxing, take in a deep breath, and buckle his belt on his pants again. They both ran out their front door to head to the police station and fell and splashed into the dirty stagnant water below.

Petunia screeched, "I told you to clean the moat water!"

Vernon doggie paddled in the shallow water towards a side he could hopefully climb back up. "When did we get a moat?"

CHAPTER EIGHT

"You do know that I'm a Malfoy right?"

"Yes you stubborn arrogant prat. I am well aware of your misguided impression of your own self-importance."

"And you still want me to apprentice to you?"

"For some reason I cannot fathom right now, yes."

"Very well. I'll do it. But no sexual favors. And don't try and trick me. I know which Potions really require nudity."

"Am I too old for you?"

Draco groaned. "Yes of course. And you have got to let the child molestation jokes drop."

Severus smirked and shook his head. "Fine. But here's a bit of advice: When you're trying to make someone stop making fun of your personal preferences involving young boys and their knuts avoid ending with the verb 'drop.' You make it too easy."

"I'm going to hate this, aren't I?"

"Oh come now, Draco. A year assistant teaching all the young Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs of the world? A year in a castle containing the Headmaster and his army of lemon drops? A year in the one place guaranteed to attract Mr. Potter's pranking wrath? You know we need to unite and suffer together."

Draco just sighed audibly and shook his head. Inside he was quite excited at the opportunity to become a Potions Master, as well as spending more time around the one person most likely to sympathize with his pain.

Severus explained. "So, you wouldn't know this, but now that our secrecy oaths have been lifted we have some more freedom in our plotting against the Lord of the Light, our Master Potter."

“And you want to know what secret I was keeping since I really have nothing holding me back now?”

Severus nodded and tried not to smile.

Draco observed him thoughtfully and was trying to drag this out like he was thinking about it. They stared at each other unblinking for four minutes before Draco cracked. “Fine. Since it really doesn’t matter. You remember some of the Dark Lord’s private journals no one could read or understand?”

Severus nodded.

“Well I copied most of them and gave them to Potter. It was how he unraveled a lot of the rituals the Dark Lord had done. But they weren’t all personal journals of his. One of them was from Slytherin himself. And several of them were spell books that would only be useful to the Golden Boy anyway.”

“One of Slytherin’s journals! Could he translate it for us?”

Draco smirked. “Well, it’s possible I may have already received a birthday present of a translation. Maybe if you’re really nice I’ll let you read it.”

“I am not nice. So what do you want?”

“Merely you to tell me everything you know about what our venerable Master has done and been up to. I know better than to think he’s merely blowing off steam. Potter is up to something.”

“That is acceptable.” Inwardly Severus was smirking. He was planning on sharing all of these things with his apprentice anyway. “What did you mean the spell books were only good to Potter?”

“Ahh, well, you know that rumor about Parsel magic being a real practicable art?”

Severus's face lit up in understanding. "Of course, he is likely the only living parseltongue at the moment. It is a written language too?"

Draco nodded. "You know the Fountain of Magical Brethren at the Ministry that no one has been able to change?" Severus nodded and urged him to continue. "Well one of the first Parsel spells Potter practiced with me was a locking charm that makes magics uncounterable without the Parsel counter."

Severus started laughing. "So no one will ever be able to return it to normal without Potter's assistance. That brat can be downright evil."

Draco smirked, "You can't exactly vanquish a dark lord by winning him over with kindness."

"I'd like to see you convince the Headmaster of that." Severus retorted.

Draco winced. "I'm guessing he is aware of my relationship with Potter, and that's how you're now able to offer me the apprenticeship and Assistant Professor position?"

Severus nodded. "I would have pushed for it last year, but a few members of his little group seem to think you're going to be the next Dark Lord."

Draco rolled his eyes. "And this is the group arguing not to judge people based on blood?"

Severus shrugged. "Well, you know the side of the Light has a new leader, who will have his own group, and we're guaranteed charter members whether we like it or not."

Draco was tickling Tibbles on his arm. "So I know Granger is teaching History these days, and I heard the DADA teacher quit this time rather than simply be killed. So who's going to be teaching that now?"

"Actually this leads into what I was going to inform you about Mr. Potter's plans. We've got Professor Flamel teaching it again. Part of

allowing him to teach again was why our secrecy oaths got removed, or substituted for.”

“Flamel? He was an excellent instructor. He’s not half as bad as the Headmaster, and even I know to respect him. I’d love to see an all out duel between him and Potter.”

Severus shook his head. “That’s doubtful to happen. Here, my young apprentice, look at this.” He handed him the vial with the black liquid in it.

“What is this? And how do you open it?”

“Two questions I would love to have answered. That’s the vial Potter password protected.”

“And what am I to do with a material we cannot identify or for that matter even get to?”

“You’re the apprentice. Figure it out. And I do know a bit more about the substance.”

Draco raised an eyebrow waiting for Severus to continue. “Mr. Potter and Professor Flamel are working on a new and impressive discovery of a magical substance and its uses. I’m told this will be more significant than the work Mr. Flamel and the Headmaster did on the uses of dragon’s blood. This is a vial of the new material they are working on.”

“Crikey. Just what we need. Potter revolutionizing wizarding society even more. Pretty soon we’ll all be wearing red and gold and playing ring around the rosey with the elves, creatures, and muggles.”

“Careful what you say. I incited Mr. Potter’s wrath at the meeting last night.”

“He was there? And I hope you didn’t need to change your drawers. He can get vindictive sometimes.”

"I believe he was there, but I'm not sure. I don't think anyone else suspects him of having been in attendance and hiding, except for the Headmaster."

"Ahh, and I take it the two of you are getting restless not knowing what is in this vial and what Mr. Potter is doing?"

"Just figure it out. That's your first task as my apprentice. You won't need to prepare for the school year, though you will be sharing in my duties."

"Fair enough. Just don't be disappointed when I haven't the foggiest clue what is in this vial when the school year starts."

"At least you've got confidence."

"Oh I've got plenty of that. Here, I want you to meet somebody." Draco led Severus into his study where he pointed to a large 8 foot portrait of a man who looked strikingly like Draco.

"Salz, I'm going to apprentice under him, so I thought he should know about you." Draco informed his painted twin.

"Severus Snape, I would like you to meet Salazar, the portrait I spoke of to you."

Severus looked at Draco oddly and nodded to the man in the portrait.

"Severus, Salz here is the one keeping an eye on the Slytherin common room. You know the unmoving portrait of Salazar Slytherin above the fireplace? In my 6th year, that portrait was swapped out with another newly made portrait. The new one which for all intents and purposes appears identical was a portrait of the portrait, but in areas unseen hidden behind the portrait in the portrait, Salazar moves and listens freely. And of course he could talk if he wanted. Pains me to say, it was a rather Slytherin idea. I mean who would question an unmoving portrait that's been there for centuries?"

"Think we could get him in trouble for invasion of privacy?"

Draco just looked at Severus.

Severus sighed. "Yeah didn't think so."

Albus was at his happiest. It was a new school year. He got his old friend Nicholas to come back and teach again. Since Nicholas left Albus had one teacher get killed, and another quit. Both after one year. He was beginning to wonder if that DADA curse was still going on. Severus seemed much more pleasant now that he brought a friend to play with at work. Hermione, just two years out of school, and now teaching for the second year, had significantly turned around failing grades and some of the disinterest in History of Magic. Maybe not too much of it, but some is a step in the right direction. Argus had resigned as well, and the new caretaker should prove to be quite entertaining. And right now, Minerva McGonagall was leading in some new ickle firsties to be sorted. Fresh young minds to corrupt and scare. In a healthy educational way of course.

The sorting hat was once again awoken and it began its annual song:

I am the Sorting Hat and you're expecting a sorting song.
I'm getting tired of this, so I promise not to take long.
Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff, Gryffindor, and Slytherin.
They're all about the same. It doesn't matter which one I put you in.

But ickle firsties, your hair can be filthy, disgusting, and grimy.
I wish you would shampoo more. You're all a bit slimy.

"No offense, Professor Snape." The lackadaisical Hat broke from his song and assured the Potions Master. The Professor was about to curse the Hat when it continued its uninspired song:

You may fear the new caretaker, but I assure you it is not her.
Any problems or pranks, it's always that rotten twerp Potter!

He's here and watching you, like in Nineteen Eighty-Four.
He was always more Slytherin even though I put him in Gryffindor.
So be careful who you talk to and watch the food that's on your plate.
Now let me sort you lazy buggers and give me my two minutes of hate!

Nicholas leaned over to Albus. "I told you to let the hat enjoy his drinking. 'It's not a problem.' I said. 'He's a hat!' I said. But noooo, you just had to interfere and piss off one of the working millennium old relics around here."

"Careful what you say about millennium old relics, Grandpa." Albus snottily replied.

Professor McGonagall cleared her throat and the limited applause the hat received was quickly halted. There were still a number of people staring at Argus Filch wondering why the hat mentioned a new female caretaker. Professor McGonagall called up the first years, and the bitter hat proceeded to sort all the students barking out house names with a lot of anger and distrust. After the kids were sorted they all feasted on the massive amounts of delicious house elf prepared food.

The Headmaster stood up, called for silence, and was about to address the students when a very well known snowy white owl flew into the Great Hall carrying a smoking red letter and dropped it in front of Professor Granger. Hedwig just shook her sad little head at Hermione and flew off. The owl cuffed Professor Flamel in the head as she left, but he was too curious about the howler to barely notice. The majority of the staff was already snickering, when the Howler burst open and started to berate the History of Magic Professor.

The well known voice of Harry Potter boomed and echoed throughout the Hall. "Professor Hermy! How dare you! That was the most important priceless artifact discovered in years! And how does a highly regarded Hogwarts professor treat a delicate piece of history? She uses it for her grocery shopping lists! Honestly. I thought you respected books. Next time I find a Magical Tome of Alexandria at an Antique Mall in Topeka, I'm just going to keep my three-fifty. You hear me, students of Hogwarts, Hermy is a book-hater! You filthy book-hater!" the howler quieted down significantly and finished "Sorry Hermy, just felt the student population should be warned and know to protect their books around you." The howler burst into shreds and dust that fell in Hermione's hair as she was banging her head on the table again. The new caretaker slowly pushed a fork that was resting on the edge of a plate underneath the History of Magic Professor's head. She managed to bring her head down on one side of the fork,

flipping the other side up, and a chunk of mashed potatoes landed on an angry Potions Master.

Albus reasserted control of the situation by scolding “Bad caretaker! Bad!”

“As I was trying to say before I was so rudely interrupted by Professor Granger’s howler, we have a few old faces to welcome back and a couple of new ones. Let’s welcome back to the post of Defense Against the Dark Arts, Professor Nicholas Flamel.” Nicholas stood and waved and received a lot of cheers. “I would also like to welcome, an apprentice to our Potions Master, and our new Assistant Professor of Potions, Professor Draco Malfoy.” Scattered applause from three tables and some loud cheering from the Slytherins. “And we have a new caretaker this year at Hogwarts, I ask that you respect her and observe all the rules. She is on a sabbatical from the auror corps and will not stand for inappropriate behavior. Miss Nympha- Oww! Excuse me, Miss Tonks.” The student body was a bit scared when Argus Filch had quickly cursed the Headmaster, and then stood up, smiled, and waved at them all.

It was an impressive silence. A bold Gryffindor could be heard in the back saying “That’s the ugliest woman I’ve ever seen.”

The Headmaster interrupted the quiet murmurs. “Since Miss Tonks seems most comfortable in the guise of our former caretaker, I will inform you all that she is a metamorphmagus. She can look like anyone, so be extra careful in any of your attempts at mischief.”

Tonks frowned and shifted into her normal pink-haired appearance scowling deeply at the Headmaster.

Someone in the back called out, “Okay now that is the ugliest woman I’ve ever seen.”

A small wave of laughter spread. Tonks snapped her head towards the direction the sound came from. “Oi! Who said that?”

The kids in the back were looking around panicking. "It was the wall over there!" One student yelled. Another responded, "No it wasn't. It was the suit of armor over there!"

Albus quickly ended the discussions and instructed the prefects to lead the students back to their house common rooms after running through the usual notices about Hogsmeade weekends, the Forbidden forest, and the practice of magic in the hallways.

As the students were filing out, Madame Pomphrey walked up to the staff table. "Professor Flamel? If you or anyone else was wishing to see the birth of an abomination of life, we're doing it now." The school's healer then left and went back to her ward.

Nicholas jumped out of his seat in excitement and was clapping his hands joyfully.

Hermione had Tonks's attention and asked, "Professor Flamel? Why are you so excited?"

"Professor Granger, I have lived over six centuries. And in that time, I have seen puppies born, I have seen cesarean sections, and I have even seen men pregnant. But I am quite sure I have never seen a man receive a cesarean section while giving birth to a puppy."

Hermione looked on a little worriedly at her happily skipping colleague. "Hey Tonks, you ever wonder how many paint fumes you would inhale over the course of nearly seven centuries of living?"

Tonks just chuckled. "Come on, Professor Hermy. You know you want to see this as much as I do."

"Okay, but hold my hand. I'm scared."

"Me too Hermy, me too."

Just as Tonks and Hermione made their way in, George yelled out "Oh my god that is disgusting!"

Madame Pomphrey responded “Hey you don’t have to tell me. But without magic muggle gynecologists do the best they can.”

George turned to his brother lying in the hospital bed. “Remember our breathing exercises. You can do this.”

“How is ‘Puff, puff, pass.’ going to help me?” A sweating Fred asked while his bulging belly was gyrating and barking.

“No idea. Just seemed like something I’ve heard people say.” George said.

“How dilated am I?” asked Fred.

George got a bit ill. “Eww and no. We’re cutting Padfoot out of your belly. Trust me. You wouldn’t survive pushing him out your urethra.”

Fred looked over. “Hey Professor Flamel, Hermione, Tonks. You guys hoping to get a pick of the litter?”

The three observers eyes widened and weren’t sure how to respond.

Fred laughed a bit. “I’m just kidding. There’s only one and we wouldn’t give him up for anything in the world.”

“Darn tootin’,” George added with a very serious look on his face.

“Alright you morons. Fred, you shouldn’t feel a thing, but if you insist on being awake for this, I cannot stand you acting like an idiot and talking. George, you’re holding him down just for good measure.” Madame Pomphrey instructed.

A numbing charm and a few smooth cuts were made before Madame Pomphrey was interrupted.

Fred suggested, “While we’ve got me open like this, any chance we could take out a rib or two safely?”

George looked a bit jealous at the prospect.

The frustrated matron responded, "Shut it Fred. You're one sick puppy."

Both brothers were startled. "Oh no! What's happening?"

"Settle down you freaks. I meant you are a living breathing perversion. The puppy seems to be doing fine. Wiggly little thing loves urinating everywhere."

Fred just giggled. "It tickles."

Madame Pomphrey lifted up some sort of fluid filled sack that made everyone watching feel ill. A few cuts on some odd pieces of membrane and they all smiled at the sound of quiet barking and yipping. The new mother relaxed back and seemed awfully woozy. Madame Pomphrey cleaned a number of odd areas and healed most of his abdomen. The puppy's other father was rocking the little guy to sleep.

"How's our little Padfoot doing?" a barely conscious Fred asked.

Madame Pomphrey smiled even if a part of her felt she had just unleashed a being of pure evil into the world. "He's going to be fine. Feed him only these exact bottles of milk. They're supposed to survive only off the milk of their mother to start with. And I truly fear wondering what you two would do to the puppy attempting to come up with something for it. So I made some special charmed milk that will act identically to a mother's. If you must be socially deviant you can fashion a teat for him to suckle from. He will be deaf for at least two weeks, and should begin developing his spots then."

"Spots?" Fred asked.

Madame Pomphrey nodded. "Yes. Padfoot is a Dalmatian. Right now his left ear is black and the rest of his body is white. He will begin developing his black round spots within a couple weeks."

"Are there any magical breeds of Dalmatians?" George asked.

Madame Pomphrey tsked and tutted. "Well there weren't before tonight. Should I be getting even more scared of you two?"

Fred replied, "No ma'am. Just asking. I still love my gay squib son." Fred was now poking his still numb stomach and running his fingers along the faint scars.

"He's probably too young to be considered gay. He's not really your son. And he's not a squib. He is a dog." She explained shaking her head.

George shook his head. "We don't care what he is. He's our Padfoot."

Madame Pomphrey asked, "You're going to be able to handle this, right?"

"Right," said Fred.

George added. "No problem Madame Pomphrey." He looked up at the healer matron. "You look like you could use a drink. I don't think we need your help anymore tonight."

"Thank you George." She nodded at him. "Tonight, Fred, you are staying here." She continued with a nod. She turned to her colleagues in Professor Granger, Professor Flamel, and Miss Tonks. "Please never mention this evening to me ever again." She walked out the door to the hospital and disappeared from sight.

Professor Flamel finally spoke up for the first time since arriving in the hospital wing. "I thought it would be funny and disgusting," He said with a big smile on his face. That quickly turned into a very ill and nauseated look. "Instead it was disgusting and funny."

Tonks just frowned and asked. "Do the insides of all men look like that?"

Professor Flamel responded. "Absolutely not! Most of us are much neater." He cast a spell on the midsection of his robes and belly and showed off the fact that his insides were a series of filing cabinets labeled as 'snips', 'snails', 'puppy dog tails', 'sugar', and 'spice'.

“What happened to ‘everything nice’?” Professor Granger asked.

Professor Flamel looked a bit ashamed. “There was hardly any there so I just sorted it with ‘snips’.”

Tonks looked apprehensively at the DADA Professor. “You’re a bit weird, aren’t you?”

Professor Flamel smiled. “Miss Tonks, I am quite old. I prefer the term eccentric.”

Hermione was beginning to think a drink and forgetting this evening sounded like a good idea. She asked Tonks. “Good night Professor Flamel. Tonks, you want some firewhiskey?”

“Please.” Tonks answered Hermione. “Night Professor.” She added to Nicholas.

As Professor Flamel headed back to his private quarters he wondered why he wasn’t even invited to get drunk to with two young attractive females. He assumed it was because with lowered inhibitions they would be unable to keep themselves from inappropriately touching his sexy body. Goodness knows he has the same problem when he drinks.

CHAPTER NINE

The timid first year Ravensclaws and Hufflepuffs were waiting on their first Potions class to begin.

The classroom doors banged open and two men stormed in, marching step for step in perfect stride with each other. Their cloaks were billowing behind them as though they were both in a wind tunnel. If you looked closely you could see the waves and movement in the two cloaks were exact mirror images of the other. They both reached the front and walked around opposite sides and met back behind the Professor's desk. They had identical evil sneers as they both started on opposite sides of the room and slowly ran their eyes across the entire class. The greasier dark haired man took a breath.

"You are here to learn the subtle science and exact art of potionmaking," he began. "I don't expect you will really understand the beauty of the softly simmering cauldron with its shimmering fumes, the delicate power of liquids that creep through human veins, bewitching the mind, ensnaring the senses ... I can teach you how to bottle fame, brew glory, even stopper death –" His demeanor quickly shifted into a bright smile. "But before we get into that, I want to talk about someone."

The younger blonde was smiling now too. "Talk about someone! That sounds swell. Who do you want to talk about?"

The dark-haired man straightened himself and looked up proudly, "I want to talk about the most important person in the world. Ever."

"Well who is that?" The blonde Professor turned towards the class. "Does anyone here know the most important person in the world?"

The first year's eyes were wide and a few Hufflepuffs were fidgeting and appeared to be resisting their natural flight instincts. None of them dared to speak.

The dark-haired one smiled and turned to his Apprentice. "Well, we'll tell you."

The two professors turned to the class, dead serious looks on their faces, and nodded their heads with every syllable when they in unison said, "Harry Potter."

It appeared like a few first years' eyes were about to just tip forward and fall out of their sockets.

"Harry Potter, as you should know, single-handedly completely decimated and humiliated the Dark Lord. He is widely accepted as the most powerful wizard alive. Some say ever."

The pair of Professor's tag-team attacked with dueling explanations of the god-like altar they all should exult The-Boy-Who-Lived on.

"The main reason, we cannot say for certain he is the most powerful ever, is both because we're not sure about many ancient wizards, and also because we cannot build sensors that will go high enough to accurately measure the incredible awe-inspiring power available at his fingertips."

"Some people say when he went to a Seer, she tried to read his lifeline, and it turned into a circle and is never-ending."

A brave Ravenclaw asked, "Do you mean he is immortal?"

The blonde nodded. "It's highly probable. Even if he's not, it's doubtful we would find out in our lifetimes. Or even our great-grandchildren's for that matter."

A confused Hufflepuff stated, "I thought he was just a powerful kid, and he's acting all childish because he never got a proper childhood."

The dark-haired man considered the statement and responded, "It's more like he is a baby God right now just testing his limits. I mean compared with eternity, he's still very much an infant."

A disbelieving Ravenclaw asked, "Are you serious? Is he a god?"

The blonde smiled and shrugged. "You may have to decide that for yourself. But I know there is a splinter sect of Wizarding Christianity

that claims Jesus was the first Son of God, but Harry is the favorite Son of God.”

The dark-haired man needed complete control in order to not let a snort escape at that last one. “I remember when he was only twelve and with no magic, only a sword, he defeated a gigantic ancient basilisk. Some people say the basilisk was the familiar of Salazar Slytherin.”

“That’s right. That was the year before he, at the tender age of thirteen, conjured a patronus charm strong enough to hold off over a hundred Dementors.”

“Something it is doubtful any other wizard on the planet could have done.”

“I got to go to school with him. You have no idea how wonderful that makes me feel. If anyone wants to touch me, just because of how close to him I have been, see me after class.”

The dark-haired man got a look of contentment on his face. “I got to instruct him for seven glorious years. Though I would have to admit he taught me a lot more than I taught him. He taught me a lot about myself.” He was nodding pleasantly at the memories.

“I doubt any of us would be alive today if it weren’t for him. We all owe him more than we could ever repay. Anytime we pay homage to the Creator, we should also appreciate our Savior and Protector. Praise be to Harry.”

“Praise be to Potter.” The dark-haired man replied.

“In the name of the Father, the Son, the other Favorite Son, the Holy Ghost. A-Potter.”

“A-Potter.” The dark-haired man turned to the shocked and scared class. “Next class we will start on some potions, but I would like you all to take the rest of the period to think about Harry Potter and everything he has done for you. Maybe consider how important he is in your life.”

The blonde suggested, "You could write him a letter and tell him so."

The dark-haired man smiled brightly. "That is an excellent idea. Class dismissed. Praise be to Harry!"

The still scared class slowly responded with "Praise be to Potter." And they got up to leave the dungeons as quickly as their legs would carry them.

When the last student exited the classroom, the blonde man locked the door and put up a silencing charm.

The two men fell down in fits of hysterical laughter.

"You know one of his greatest wishes is to be a normal wizard." Severus chuckled out.

Draco snickered back. "We should hang up a chart on the wall comparing him to Merlin."

"I was thinking we should start a campaign for Harry Potter: King of the World."

News and rumors travel very quickly around the castle. And that afternoon's first year Gryffindor-Slytherin Potions class all became victims, being forced to witness both of their Professors flail about in what the healers later classified as 'orgasmic seizures.'

Professor Nicholas Flamel had just dismissed his last class of the day. He was a bit perturbed to hear students in the hallways greeting each other with "Hi! Praise be to Harry." He was looking forward to meeting with Professor Granger this late afternoon. He wasn't sure if the woman he referred to in his head as The CareTonkser would be accompanying her or not. Sure enough, Hermione and Tonks walked in together. They exchanged pleasantries and Hermione was about to brief Nicholas on what they'd discovered when into the classroom walked another pink-haired Tonks. The two Tonks both had widened eyes locked onto each other.

They stood up and faced each other and said at the same time, "Harry! It's Harry!" while pointing at each other. Hermione took a step back away from the Tonks she had arrived with.

Both Tonks looked angry and yelled at the other in unison. "If we all three stun him at once, one of us will get through." The two Tonks narrowed their eyes at each other. "And stop copying me!"

"Oh quit it! ... Stop! Stop! St-...-op! Quit that!" The two Tonks ran at each other and started to wrestle. They were pulling hair and going for the soft tissue pretty equally.

Hermione and Nicholas both cast stunners at different Tonkses. The spell washed over their cloaks and barely affected them though it had the desired effect of splitting the two apart. They again said in unison. "Auror's cloak absorbs most spells."

One of the Tonks said "But Professor Flamel's stunner should have been stronger! He's Harry!"

The other Tonks had visibly widening eyes before she disappeared with a pop. The apparently real Tonks said, "Crap! I forgot Potty can pop!"

Hermione was mumbling "Stupid house elf."

Nicholas was looking around the room trying to figure out what his senses were saying. "I'm not sure he's gone. I didn't sense him leave I don't think. It felt more like he masked himself. Like his magical essence trickled away. Though I suppose that could be what a human popping would do."

Tonks was looking at Hermione. "So what did 'I' say to you guys before I got here?"

Hermione shook her head. "Nothing. Is it going to be safe to talk here Professor?"

Nicholas shook his head. "Yeah it's as safe as anywhere else. Whatever I felt earlier is completely gone. We're the only three people in this room, I'm almost certain of it. And please call me Nicholas."

Tonks smiled at the calming presence of the old man.

Hermione smiled. "Thank you Nicholas, and please call me Hermione. Now I'll give you a rundown of what we have ascertained so far."

"Brief rundown." Tonks interjected and received a frown in response.

Hermione ran through the majority of the feats Harry was rumored to have accomplished and places he may have been. Tonks remained relatively silent and was nodding along with her. Hermione then presented a chart cross-referenced with a timeline on where Harry Potter was rumored to have been, and showed that a few times he was in two places at once.

"Now at first I thought one of the rumors must be inaccurate when I encountered these. But it wasn't just the one isolated incident. And you can see here, on April Fools Day it appears he was in three places at once. And that is unlikely to be coincidence."

Nicholas looked at Hermione willing her to make a conclusion. She smiled at Tonks and said, "I'm pretty sure he's been using a time turner and literally has been in a few places at the same time. And my research indicates he's going to be less active and focusing here at Hogwarts this year."

Tonks looked at Hermione appraisingly. "You figured that out from just these rumors? Hmm. Good to know."

Hermione nodded and was about to continue when she looked behind Nicholas and gasped at a slowly appearing person. Her eyes widened and she stared at the Tonks sitting next to her and started screaming. "You!"

Nicholas turned around and looked up and saw another pink-haired Tonks floating in the air, bound, gagged, and silenced. For all the fidgeting she was doing no sound could be heard. The Tonks who

had been listening in on their reports said. "I think perhaps I should leave now." With a wink, a smile, and a snap of her fingers she disappeared in a pop. And the other bound, gagged Tonks fell to the floor and let out an "Oomph."

Nicholas and Hermione rushed over to the new Tonks, and released her bindings and gag, apologizing profusely to her.

The indignant auror was scolding the ancient alchemist. "Only the three of us in here? You're certain of that?" She shook her sore head. "Well I think Harry has a pretty clear picture of what we know now."

Hermione was ashamed. "Oh goodness. But he certainly added fuel to the fire of my theory of him focusing on Hogwarts."

Tonks was shaking her head at being played again. "You guys should have seen the little twitches he was making each time you recounted a place, feat, or rumor. I thought he was going to crack a few times."

Nicholas added, "I thought you just found the stories humorous Miss Tonks. I did notice you seemed to be holding back your laughter."

Tonks rolled her eyes. "Excellent powers of observation. I see nothing gets past you."

"Look here, Miss Tonky, I never lied to you. I felt no one else in the room, I'm not sure how he did it, but I only ever sensed you, Hermione, and me in here. And as I said before, this room was as safe as any, because if he can mask himself that well here, he could do the same in any other room."

Tonks apologized to Professor Flamel. "Sorry, I'm just frustrated at being so close to Harry and being unable to get back at him. Or get him on his back for that matter."

Professor Flamel snickered. Hermione blushed and nodded though.

Nicholas went back to the discussion at hand. "Before we were so rudely interrupted, I was going to say I would have to agree with you on the time turner. We know he's had one and used it extensively if

he received as much private tutelage as it appears. My inclination is that he knew we were going to be having this discussion and planned out substituting himself for Miss Tonks to hear our theories and see how close we were getting to him.”

Hermione and Tonks nodded looking intrigued.

“I believe we are getting too close to him for his comfort. Hence he is fighting back. And I’ll be frank, given Professor Snape’s reactions at the Order meeting, I am pretty sure he was there too. He may have been in the guise of one of the members, or he may have just been a fly on the wall. I’m wondering, did any of you notice anyone’s stories or mentions of gifts sounding very curious?”

Hermione and Tonks looked at each other and were thinking. Hermione added, “He wasn’t Snape. But Severus was clearly acting quite different.”

Tonks mentioned, “Kingsley’s story about The-Boy-Who-Rules seemed a bit farfetched, but I’m pretty sure that was Kingsley. And the name, The-Boy-Who-Rules, is too fitting for it not to be the truth.”

Nicholas nodded. “I know. I really have no suspects, but the way Snape reacted to his modified Dark Mark indicated Harry was listening and sending sensations accordingly.”

Tonks snapped her fingers. “Oh! Did you guys see this weeks Quibbler yet?”

Nicholas raised an eyebrow. “The Quibbler? Is there something I should know about it?”

Hermione explained how the regular column about This Week in Harry Potter was according to Luna actually written by Harry and he just sends them in with pictures.

Tonks pulled the paper out of one of the pockets on her auror robes. “Here we go.”

The Quibbler presents: This week in Harry Potter!

Harry Potter, the Astronaut?

By: Tom Soprano Fonpodgy Photos by: Morrie Van Mudbleed

The first official launch for Britain's foray into the world of deep space aeronautics and exploration was marred by the discovery of a stowaway on the Space Shuttle Lightning. The unnamed man, seen here waving from a window as the rocket ship began its liftoff has a very familiar scar and can be seen smiling and winking. The crew members complained of unknown extra weight and hearing sounds but apparently have not located the stowaway on the small ship. The government will be looking into criminal charges once the shuttle returns from its six month mission assuming the unknown man can be located. It is questionable whether he will be fit for trial.

"Something tells me he really did this one." Tonks said with a smile.

"Oh, I'm almost certain of it." Nicholas agreed. "Hmm, perhaps that was a poor choice of words. Let me try again. I suspect you are correct, Tonks."

Tonks was shaking her head. "Thank you Nicholas."

Hermione was thinking. "This space launch was huge muggle news. And it was like three months ago. I don't remember hearing about a stowaway, but none of the muggle photographers had close-ups this good. How many of these things has Harry got stockpiled?"

Nicholas thought about that. "Hmm. These do seem to be a bit dated, and are more for Harry's amusement than they are legitimate clues for us."

"I still think he's here in the castle just hiding. I mean you heard about Draco and Severus's morning class, right?" Hermione asked.

Nicholas and Tonks were chuckling and nodding.

"And you heard about their afternoon class?"

Nicholas and Tonks were outright laughing now. "We may need to bring in an official counselor and psychotherapist. Those children are probably scarred for life."

Nicholas pointed out, "Do you two realize the Sorting Hat basically told every student to feel free to prank us all to kingdom come, and that the blame will fall to Mr. Potter?"

Hermione hadn't considered this and started to get a bit worried.

Tonks added. "True, but they're all a bit scared themselves of Mr. Potter. And I don't think Snape and Malfoy eased anyone's fears."

The three staff members headed out to the Great Hall for dinner.

When Professor Flamel, Professor Granger, and Tonks arrived they saw the students were all silent and watching the scene in the middle of the hall. The Headmaster was jumping up and down and appeared to have forgotten he was a wizard.

"Stop it Peeves! No! That's mine!" the petulant older man exclaimed.

The poltergeist Peeves was holding a candy dish and dangling it just out of the Headmaster's reach. "Ahh, Ahh, Ahh. You didn't say Peevesy's magic word."

"For goodness sake Peeves! I am the Headmaster! You're not even supposed to be able to enter my office! Or the Great Hall."

Peeves was holding out the dish in front of the Headmaster and then yanking it away whenever he made a swipe for it. "Peevesy's got a new Master. Master Potty takes care of Peevesy."

"Rotten useless ungrateful petulant twit!" an irate Headmaster exclaimed.

Nicholas made himself known. "Peeves! Will you return the dish or do I need to call for the Bloody Baron?"

Albus looked over at Professor Flamel gratefully but his face quickly fell when he heard. "Baron is who introduced me to Master Potty!"

Peeves was dangling the dish while Albus was whining and groaning.

“I shant give it back unless you sing Peevesy the song.”

Albus looked resigned. He couldn't give up his lemon drop dish. Even if the rotten twerp at the root of his current headache was the one who gave him the dish in the first place.

Albus tucked his thumbs under his armpits and began flapping his arms like a chicken. “Peeves is the bestest. Better than the retest. No one is funnier. Or even punnier. Peeves is my hero. Potty is a zero. Cluck Cluck Squawk. Cluck Cluck Squawk!” he finished with a completely undignified movement of thrusting forward his alpha male chicken chest and his arms back.

Peeves grumbled. “Potty said you would do it. Peevesy didn't believe him. Fine! Take your dish.” Peeves finished and tossed the dish high in the air and quickly flew out of the Great Hall. Albus's eyes were firmly fixed on his dish and held out both arms to basket catch it before it hit the ground.

Nicholas, Hermione, and Tonks really should have been expecting something to happen. But they couldn't have guessed the dish was in actuality a portkey. And apparently a very cleverly designed portkey, as Albus disappeared who knows where, and his clothes stayed behind and fell to the floor empty.

A man at a desk in the atrium of the Ministry of Magic could have sworn he saw the Head of the Wizengamot streaking out from under the cloth-covered Fountain of Magical Brethren with only a small silver candy dish covering his private areas. The running nude man made it to the apparition area and disappeared before the watchman could be sure of what he saw.

The Headmaster was saddened when he arrived back in his office, after stopping home for some clothes, and saw his real lemon drop dish was still safe on his desk. He made it to the Great Hall just as dinner was beginning to wind down, and received a fair amount of applause.

“Thank you very much. I must remember to hurt Mr. Potter greatly the next time I see him. Before you all go, I would like to inform you that the weekend before Halloween is a Hogsmeade weekend. And on the evening of Halloween we will be having a costume ball. Costumes are required. For everybody.” He was looking at his fellow staff members. “Including the staff. That is all. Enjoy your evening.” The Headmaster grabbed his pile of clothes and decided to have a late dinner in his office. He wasn’t sure he trusted the food on the staff table at the moment.

CHAPTER TEN

“Well Neville, it does sound like the Kiss of Ra could very well be a potion to help your folks. There are a few ingredients here that may be difficult to locate though, but the Moonflower Daisy petals would have been the only one I would have considered impossible.” Hermione explained to her friend.

Neville smiled and grimaced. “I was afraid of that. Darn sassy cheekhead.”

“What’d Harry do besides provide you with an opportunity to help your parents?”

“He’s tricking us into confronting Professor Snape. Maybe even befriending him.”

“Oh Neville, he’s not that bad.”

“Do you not remember any of my Potions classes at all?”

Hermione winced. “I was hoping you might have forgotten those, but I guess not.”

Neville narrowed his eyes. “He used to be my boggart for goodness sake. It’s not the easiest thing in the world to forget.”

“He’s not your boggart anymore?”

Neville shook his head.

“Well what is?”

“It’s kind of personal and I’d rather not say.”

“Oh I’m sorry. Of course Neville.” Hermione apologized. “Would you like me to come with you when you ask for Professor Snape’s help?”

“You bet your butter you’re coming with me. Let’s get this over with. Now.” Neville exclaimed before leading the way out of the History of Magic classroom and headed down towards the dungeons.

Hermione quickly caught up and walked with Neville. “Is it spiders?”

Neville turned to her. “What? No. I’m not afraid of spiders. That’s just Ron.”

Hermione kept walking and thinking. “Is it girls?”

“No. Don’t be silly.” Neville said as they continued. “Hermione, did you just ask me that because you think I’m gay? Or because you think I’m straight?”

Hermione shook her head. “Never mind.” She was quiet for about five seconds before she asked, “Does it have to do with your grandmother?”

“Hermione! I said I didn’t want to tell you.”

Hermione pouted. “You never said I couldn’t guess though. So, is it a plant?”

Neville was getting frustrated and stopped walking. “Alright! Fine.” Neville yelled. “Have you ever seen Little Shop of Horrors?”

Hermione’s face split into a smile. “Yes!”

Neville looked her in the eye and said, “Well it has absolutely nothing to do with that.” And he quickly turned and headed on to the dungeons.

“Come on Neville. That’s not fair. I’ll tell you mine if you tell me yours.”

“Oh please Hermione. What’s next? You going to pinky swear to be my best friend? And besides I already know yours.”

“You do not! It’s probably changed since you last saw it anyway.”

“Yeah. I know. Now your greatest fear is to receive an ancient magical tome and to accidentally ruin it by writing grocery lists in it.”

Hermione was blushing now and getting angry. “Fine. So it is. But now you have to tell me yours.”

“Forget it Hermione. You’ve already got enough things to make fun of me for. And I still owe you for petrifying me in first year.”

“In fairness Neville, if we’d let you stop us that night, Voldemort would have gotten the stone and become immortal.”

“Oh geez. You hide behind that excuse for everything. It’s always ‘Voldemort would have won’ or ‘Harry would have died’ or ‘I don’t care if they’re enjoying it! No more House elf flying experiments!’ I’ll tell you what Hermione, you show me your breasts and I’ll tell you.”

Hermione shrieked. “Neville! That is completely inappropriate to even ask! And it’s crude and way too personal!”

Neville just raised an eyebrow and stared at Hermione in response.

Hermione just huffed angrily. “Alright. Fine. I get it.”

Neville smirked victoriously and was about to change the subject when Hermione quickly looked both ways down the hall and pulled up her sweater, shirt, and bra and flashed Neville.

“Buh...err...duh...” He mumbled out.

“But now I’m getting proof. We’re going to Nicholas’s office and getting a boggart.” Hermione grabbed Neville by the elbow and quickly headed towards the DADA office.

Professor Flamel explained. “Sure. Got a couple boggarts in boxes in the back. Let me grab one.”

He returned moments later. “Neville, you sure you’re ready for this?”

He was still occasionally making sounds with his mouth. "Duh...err..."

Nicholas smiled and said "Works for me," before lifting the lid on a box and aiming it towards Neville.

Professor Flamel watched the boggart shift forms and shapes before settling on something very recognizable. "Wow! That's a heck of a nice looking pair! Whose are those Neville?"

Hermione eyes nearly popped out of her head as she let out a loud "Eep!" and grabbed Neville quickly leaving the room. She yelled back from the hallway, "Thanks Professor Flamel. Bye."

"Somehow this is Harry's fault I know it. Argh!" an embarrassed and angry Hermione was yelling.

"Erg...umm...homina..."

Hermione couldn't take anymore and slapped the young man harshly across his face.

"Ouch!" he yelled tenderly rubbing his cheek. "Umm...thanks Hermione. You know, for everything."

Hermione just shook her head. "At the very least Neville, will you tell me what your boggart used to be?"

"It used to be Professor Snape. You know that."

"No! I mean after that."

Neville giggled. "Oh, no, it's always been Snape. I was just lying and wondering if you would show me the twins. In seventh year Harry taught me a trick with your mind to focus on an image and control what a boggart becomes. But I'll call us even for the Petrificus now." Neville finished with a goofy grin and headed on towards the dungeons again.

She was thinking 'I knew this was Harry's fault!' but continued to scowl at Neville.

"Come on Hermione. Don't hate the player. I'm trying to get into a Slytherin mindset, so I can relate to Snape better."

Hermione just huffed but walked beside him none the less. "I can't help but wonder if Harry's cheek is contagious and spreading."

They knocked on the Potions Master's office.

A silky voice from inside said, "Professor Granger, Mr. Longbottom. What a pleasan- ...mmm. Well, what a surprise."

Hermione just rolled her eyes. "Professor Snape, Professor Malfoy. Perhaps you both can help us. We have a bit of a challenge for you."

Professor Snape raised an eyebrow but noticeably absent was his traditional sneer. "And what would that be?"

Neville straightened himself a bit prouder than he felt. "I was hoping you might be willing to make the Kiss of Ra."

Draco and Severus's eyes both widened at this opportunity. "I'm assuming you have some notes on it, because as far as I know there aren't any copies of instructions or ingredients on that potion in any book I've seen."

Hermione nodded. "Yes we do. We think it fell out of most knowledge because there weren't any more Moonflower Daisies around to be able to make it."

Draco nodded. "That would make sense. I'm assuming your intent is to try this out as an alternative healing method for your parents?"

Neville was feeling slightly scared that no one had made fun of him or said anything crude about his parents. "I was hoping to give it a try. Professor Flamel suggested the idea to me, indicating it seemed awfully convenient that I received a Moonflower Daisy, Hermione received a tome of ancient information, and you, Professor Snape, received many powerful and rare potions ingredients."

Draco smiled. "Ah yes, the Slytherin in Gryffindor clothing. This does sound like his sort of machination."

"Hush apprentice! You're dirtying the noble name of Slytherin." Snape scolded. "Alright Mr. Longbottom, I'll tell you what. You continue to provide me with a healthy amount of ingredients or grow and harvest some of the more rare ones I need, and I will make you the potions you request."

Hermione turned to Neville. Neville's eyes were wide and he wasn't sure how to respond to this courteous Snape.

Snape saw the young man was struggling. "I'm well aware that despite how dismal at Potions you are, you are an excellent herbologist, botanist, and Earth elemental. We can help each other out this way."

Neville slowly nodded. "Ohh...kay."

Hermione handed them a copy of the notes on the potion as well as a small bag full of Moonflower Daisy petals. "We were hoping you would have the other ingredients, as none of them are extinct to the best of my knowledge."

Severus looked over the ingredient list. "Mmm. Yes I do believe I have all of these. But it looks like it takes a couple months to brew. Two separate steps requiring a full moon."

Neville still stood there a bit dumbly.

"Well, anything you need you can ask me or send Neville an owl." Hermione explained giving a curious look towards Neville.

They all stood in silence for a few seconds. Hermione elbowed Neville. "Say 'Thank you,' Neville." She whispered out the corner of her mouth.

Neville nodded and said "Thank you, Nev-" was as far he got before Hermione slapped her hand over his mouth.

“Good day Professors.” She said and walked out of the dungeon dragging a slow moving Neville with her. Neville was taking small steps backwards afraid to turn his back on these two Professors.

The next couple weeks, there were numerous pranks around the school. It seemed like some students were taking advantage of the fact that everyone blames Harry Potter first. Or it’s also possible Harry was being busy and quite childish, and even threw in a few amateurish pranks to throw people off his scent. The Professors had by now all learned to roll with the punches. Many of them just wrote it off that if there hadn’t been any Voldemort, then they would have had a horrible 7 years of the Marauder heir with his best friend strategist, and the schools most brilliant witch assisting him. When Albus offered that comparison, the happenings of the school seemed quite mild.

Albus had asked a number of Order members to help chaperone the Costume Ball for Halloween for a couple of reasons. One, so that he would be free to corner and interrogate his DADA Professor, and two, so that whatever Harry inevitably did, others would have to deal with it. And it was for this reason Remus, Ginny, Fred, and George could be found at Hogwarts in the afternoon of October 31st.

They all brought their costumes or had planned them out and were sitting in the History of Magic classroom talking with Tonks and Hermione. Fred and George had brought Padfoot with them and were doting on their puppy like a couple of mother hens. Padfoot had grown up a lot and was covered in spots all over. He was quite playful but extremely shy around people he didn’t know. He sniffed all these new people, but seemed scared of Tonks.

Hermione asked, “Can Padfoot do any tricks yet? Or are you teaching him any?”

Fred looked at George with a smile. “Of course he can! Watch this.” Fred set down Padfoot and all the adults were seated around watching the little puppy.

“Speak Padfoot! Come on boy! Speak!”

Padfoot looked at all the people staring and bowed his head shyly.

“Come on boy! You can do it! Speak, Padfoot, Speak!”

The cute little puppy looked around again, and settled his eyes on Hermione. An oddly normal but quiet voice came out of his mouth, “Hello.”

“Aaaaahhhhh!” Tonks shrieked and jumped to her feet. “That dog is the devil.”

Padfoot saw the playful pink-haired girl having fun and said louder, “Hello.”

She screamed some more and was backing away.

Padfoot saw an opportunity to play and again said “Hello.”

Tonks began to run away from the hell spawn, while it chased her around the room yelling out “Hello! Hello. Hello!” Her screaming back seemed to just incite more loud “Hello” responses.

Hermione, Ginny, and Remus were all torn between abject horror at the puppy and complete hysterics at Tonks reaction. They were laughing and snickering at her, until Fred and George snuck up behind Ginny and Hermione and said “Boo!”

The girls responded by shrieking much like Tonks and Padfoot began running at them barking as loud as he can the word “Hello!”

Remus gave into the hysterics and realized that perhaps the spirit of Padfoot was in this puppy. Sirius would probably love being the dog doted upon by the Weasley twins, and would have sold a piece of his soul for the ability to say ‘Hello’ as a dog.

Eventually they all calmed down, though the girls still jumped every time Padfoot would say ‘Hello’. This would make the guys all laugh which in turn would give Padfoot the necessary positive reassurance that he was a good puppy.

It was time for them to help chaperone the Costume Ball, so they all were switching into their costumes. Remus pulled on an extremely

large and fluffy white cloud like looking object. Ginny asked, "Umm Remus, what are you supposed to be?"

Remus smiled at his own cleverness. "I'm a sheep."

Hermione was the first to spot the irony and said. "Bad pun Remus. But nice costume."

Fred came out, with streaked black and white hair, a huge fake fur coat, and a woman's dress on. Hermione asked "And what are you Fred?"

He smiled and said "I'm Cruella De Vil."

Ginny asked, "Are you trying to horribly scare Padfoot?"

Fred shook his head. "Nope. That's George's job."

George came out with a chef's hat on, and a bloody apron that read at the top "What's your favorite kind of dog?" Below in smaller letters it said, "Mine is medium rare." And it listed the restaurant it was from, "Wok the Dog: Seoul, South Korea."

Remus was snickering, while Padfoot was happy and jumped into George's arms. They decided not to do anything too bad to Padfoot while he was still developing some. So they took a marker and drew a lightning bolt scar over Padfoot's eye.

Ginny was sick of being small and called things like lithe, slender, and spunky so she was going as a Giantess to the Ball. She had an oversized head and was a good 15 feet tall now. She was carrying a club for good measure, though she had to charm it, because she certainly wasn't as strong as a giant.

Hermione was quite proud of her costume. She had the fake beard, the balding head, and the glasses. It greatly surprised Hermione that no one recognized Melvil Dewey, the famed inventor of the Dewey Decimal System and the Dewey Magical Notation System. But even though no one recognized her, she took great pleasure in explaining

her costume and a large chunk of Melvil Dewey's life story to anyone who inquired.

Tonks was just plain cheating. As a metamorphmagus, she didn't even have to really try for her costume. She got vetoed on being Harry Potter. Apparently that would be too easy, and probably make Harry too happy. So instead, she was going to the costume ball as Voldemort. A fine costume for a chaperone, although a difficult one if she was hoping to do a lot of dancing.

They all walked into the Great Hall just as the Headmaster, Professor Flamel, and Professor Flitwick were putting the finishing touches on the decorations. The three older professors all got out of chaperoning in exchange for doing all the set up work. Tonks found that a bit unfair, but apparently the 'young whipper snappers' don't get an equal say. Though even if she did, there is no force in magic as strong as 'tenure' anyway.

Albus had asked Nicholas to join him for a drink, while the Halloween ball was going on. He had left the emceeing duties to Minerva, and would hopefully be able to finagle some answers out of his old friend.

"Welcome, Nicholas, welcome. We're already two months into term and we haven't had the opportunity to just sit down and talk."

"Thank you Albus. I suppose our needs aren't so pressing without a Dark Lord out to kill your favorite student."

Albus nodded. "I am grateful for that. Could I interest you in a firewhiskey? Or perhaps a Flaming Margarita?"

Nicholas got a mischievous smile. "Can you make my Flamer with tapioca?"

"Of course Nicholas. I wouldn't have offered if I couldn't have."

The two old men were relaxing and sipping their smoldering fruity beverages. Albus began, "So tell me, how goes the research project?"

Nicholas shook his head. "Albus. You know it would just frustrate you if I was able to say anything, because it simply wouldn't be enough."

"You're already frustrating me old man!" Albus growled back. "Oh my. Excuse me. Sorry."

Nicholas just smiled. "No apologies necessary. I know how you are when you drink."

Albus shrugged and took a big swig of his Flamer. "Alright, so frustrate me anyway. Just knowing that it's out there is killing me. Can't you tell me what you're studying?"

Nicholas was settling himself and looked over at Fawkes. "Hmm well, not exactly. But I can say a number of these discoveries will make impossible things possible."

Albus frowned. "I assumed that was the point of calling something a discovery. It changes the way we believed things to be. But it looks like you're going to continue to be useless to me." He ended bitterly.

Nicholas just snickered. "Albus, how about this: I should be able to at least tell you the substance as a Christmas present."

Albus realized he had very little to bargain with and said, "That is acceptable. Now tell me how the hunt for Mr. Potter has been going."

Nicholas chuckled. "You know Dudley Dursley was the first person to coin the term 'Harry-hunting' although it seems like we've all adopted it in a somewhat affectionate way. As for our findings we are not having much luck. We know he's been in the castle many times, Tonks was wrestling with him the second day of term in fact."

"Miss Tonks was wrestling with him? How did we miss him?"

Nicholas looked away. "Umm yeah, well you see, Professor Granger and I sent stunners at them both, but since they looked identical we didn't know which was which. He kind of played with us before popping away. Dern House elf tricks."

Albus was chuckling, "I sense a lot more behind the innocuous comment 'he kind of played with us' but I think what I am imagining is probably as funny as the truth."

Nicholas cleared his throat quite loudly. "Anyway, no concrete spottings, but we're pretty sure he's in the castle often, and he is also in possession of and is perhaps using a time turner to appear in several places at once, and throw people off his trail."

Albus nodded thoughtfully. "I will tell you, Hogwarts is also trying to protect him herself, but she did slip up and mention that he has been in here non-stop since school started. I was curious if you had any thoughts as to where he might be hiding."

Nicholas eyed Albus carefully. "We were entertaining thoughts that he may have been at the Order meeting just before term as well. I wondered if he was impersonating an Order member, or was just another hidden fly on the wall. Do you think he may be at Hogwarts impersonating a student? Or for that matter a staff member?"

Albus sighed and shrugged. "I certainly wouldn't put it past him, but I have no leads and this is killing me. I just can't stand not knowing!"

Nicholas chuckled. "You sound like Professor Granger."

"And you don't seem to be taking your Harry-hunting responsibilities seriously enough!"

Nicholas rolled his eyes. "Please Albus. I make it no secret that teaching and my research project both take precedent, but I am doing everything I am capable of to help. I may not be able to physically clearly say some things, but I have been leading people towards the right directions as best as I can."

A resigned Albus responded "I know Nicholas, I know. What would you think would happen if I called in my life-debt from you and forced you to tell me everything you know about Mr. Potter?"

Nicholas's eyes were wide. "That just might work, you know. But as a friend, I would advise you not to do that. At least not yet. I think there might be a risk to me, but a pretty slight one."

Albus looked over at his friend and sighed.

"Albus, you may need to look at this more from Mr. Potter's perspective. He has been leaving clues to a puzzle of sorts. He is playing a game with us all. Professor Granger has been mildly successful at predicting his patterns. Calling in a life-debt to get the answers out of me, would be like cheating at the game. I think he wants you to figure it out. I'm just a shield he's manipulating and hiding behind. I think I'll be able to spring a trap on him or turn around and bite him when he least expects it though."

Albus finished off his Flamer. "Very well Nicholas. I won't force you to break your oath." He was shaking his head. "Yet."

Nicholas nodded and smiled at his frustrated friend.

Angry Albus rose to the surface again, "But you better come through for me on Christmas!"

Nicholas nodded. "Who knows? Maybe we will have 'caged the beast' by then, as Professor Snape so eloquently put it."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

An angry Voldemort was sitting by the punch bowl staring at anyone who hovered too long. She turned to the 15 foot Giantess next to her. "I can't believe Harry hasn't done anything to us or this situation yet."

The Giantess shook her massive head. "It could be that not doing anything is what we least expect, and he's just going to leave us jumpy all night."

A quiet little puppy said "Hello" and both Voldemort and the Giantess gasped and clutched their hearts.

The Giantess regained control of her fear first. "See what I mean?"

Voldemort nodded. "Yeah. Hey Dewey! Come here."

Melvil Dewey walked over to Voldemort and the Giantess. "No sign of Harry, right?"

Voldemort nodded. "Yeah. And I wouldn't be surprised if he doesn't even show up. I was talking with Ginny the Giantess here, and thought we really need to completely forget Harry Potter for a night. We have almost the whole Order here watching the children. Let's get toasted and have a good time."

The Giantess nodded. "Yeah, besides, the students all know the Order is here, so if we do manage anything embarrassing, we can just blame it on another member. Let's take advantage of these costumes."

An eagerly agreeing Melvil Dewey nodded too. "Yeah, and as long as the adults keep their costumes on and identities hidden maybe I can finally get laid too."

Voldemort was snickering and smiling at Dewey. A few students dropped their cups in fright at the Dark Lord smiling and laughing. The Giantess waved over Cruella De Vil. "Hey Cruella, we need three bottles of firewhiskey, pronto!"

Cruella just reached into his Dalmatian colored coat, and pulled out three unopened bottles of Ogden's and handed them right over. He saluted the Giantess, Voldemort, and Dewey and said "Good luck ladies."

All three grabbed took their bottles and tipped them back taking a few big gulps to get started. Melvil Dewey showed her appreciation with a loud belch. Voldemort patted her on the back to help her out. In less than half an hour they were all nearing the bottom of their bottles.

"You know, us wasting our time searching for Harry, we're just doing exactly what he wants." A slightly inebriated Dark Lord slurred out.

Melvil Dewey nodded so quickly her head began to hurt. "I know!" She was speaking a bit on the loud side. "He wouldn't be winning at his game, if we weren't falling for his game and playing his game, the way he plays his game like ...err his game."

The drunken Giantess yelled out. "Yeah! Forget Harry Potter!"

Dewey replied. "Screw Harry Potter!"

The Giantess and Voldemort replied in unison "Yeah! Screw him!" Some painfully bad attempts at giving each other high-fives involved inappropriate touching.

A song ended, and a new one began. Voldemort jumped to her feet, and particularly liked the sensations her head felt doing that. She then remembered why she jumped and said, "I love this song! Rick James!" Voldemort made her way onto the dance floor and grabbed hold of the first adult along the way. It was a man dressed as a pirate with an eye patch, and a puffy black pirate shirt with lots of ruffles. Voldemort and the pirate were making a bit of a scene grinding on the dance floor.

Melvil Dewey was not about to let the Dark Lord have all the drunken fun, and she too headed out to the dance floor grabbing onto another nearby adult. If she were paying attention, she would have thought it curious that she had also grabbed someone dressed as a pirate,

though her man was wearing a puffy, ruffled, and even feathered white pirate shirt.

The Giantess watched her two friends dancing spasmodically, and was quickly learning the words to the song Voldemort claimed to love. She was singing to herself, "He's a super cheek. Super cheek. He's super cheeky!" Seeing a beautiful lonely Giantess, a mysterious pirate with an extremely puffy green ruffled shirt could not just stand back and let her spend the evening alone. He began to chat her up and dance with her. Occasionally they would laugh hearing Voldemort and Melvil Dewey exclaim "Screw Harry Potter!"

The next morning, Ginny woke up slowly. She remembered the dreamy pirate guy she had danced and had fun with. As well as a lot of drinking. But she didn't even have a slight hangover. In fact she felt great. She was skipping through the halls back to Hermione's staff quarters to check on her.

She knocked on the door. "Hermione? Can I come in?"

A giggly smiling Hermione answered the door. "Of course, Ginny. It's always delightful to see someone else who can appreciate the morning. I want to apologize if I sort of ditched you and Tonks last night, but I had the most wonderful evening. Do you need a hangover potion?"

Ginny smiled brightly. "No thanks, I feel great actually. And you wouldn't believe my night either. I don't want to sound like a slut or anything, but my god, one night stands can be more cathartic than any potions sometimes."

Hermione blushed and bowed her head. "I know exactly what you mean. Last night was exactly what I needed. I doubt I'll ever see him again, and I almost don't want to know who he was under the eye patch."

Ginny had been smiling until she heard 'eye patch.' "Wait! Was your guy dressed as a pirate and wearing a horrible puffy shirt?"

Hermione looked at Ginny nodding. "White silk shirt, with a ton of ruffles in the front and sleeves that were almost like a drag queen's boa?"

Ginny nodded. "Exactly! Except mine had a green shirt."

Hermione was visibly getting upset. "Let's go find out if Tonks snagged a pirate too."

"What!" The irate caretaker exclaimed. "You mean we all slept with him? Or some merry band of pirates? And why don't I have a hangover?"

Hermione frowned. "We think it's because of our pirates. None of us feel ill or bad. Just used."

Tonks asked, "Used? Umm, I was intending to be the user last night, and if anything he would have been the usee. My pirate said his name was Tom. How bout you?"

Hermione groaned and said "Dick."

Ginny blushed and said "I didn't think to ask his name."

"Tom, Dick, and blank! He can be so bloody insolent." Hermione exclaimed.

Tonks started giggling. "Screw Harry Potter indeed. Good call, Hermy."

Ginny smiled victoriously, "You think it was Harry for all of us last night?"

Tonks and Hermione nodded. "Yes."

"Well that makes me feel better. I should head back home and shower. I think it's going to be a beautiful day." A smug Ginny said and left the castle.

Tonks and Hermione walked to breakfast with mixed feelings on the evenings encounter. They needed some time to not think about Harry, and to relax and forget about him. Of course, then unknowingly sleeping with him does make you feel a bit like the butt of one of his jokes.

Many of their illusions were slightly shattered when they arrived at breakfast and saw the Headmaster wearing a familiar looking puffy white shirt. Seated next to him was Professor Flamel in a familiar black shirt. Tonks and Hermione both paled at the smiles and quiet giggling conversations the two were sharing. They feared the discussions that would be happening at the staff table during breakfast and decided to just go hit the kitchens for this meal.

Upon arriving, the first thing they saw was a giggling and smiling Dobby wearing a puffy green pirate shirt. He nodded at both of the groaning and blushing ladies, and asked what he could do for them.

“We came down here for some breakfast.” Tonks replied.

Hermione watched the elf curiously. “That’s an interesting shirt, Dobby. Do you mind if I ask where you got it?”

Dobby smiled. “No Ma’am! Dobby don’t mind a bit.” After giving his permission Dobby was now waiting patiently to see if Professor Granger was going to ask him where he got it.

Tonks and Hermione seemed to be waiting on an answer still.

Hermione couldn’t stand the waiting. “Dobby, where did you get your shirt?”

Dobby smiled. “Sorry Miss Hermy, but Dobby don’t want to answer your question. But feel free to ask it anytime.” He finished with an eager nod.

Hermione snapped her attention towards Tonks. “Does he seem more cheeky than usual to you?”

Both girls noticed the blush and smile Dobby got. Tonks asked, "Dobby, are you taking lessons in being cheekier?"

Dobby looked panicked. He looked left and he looked right. He looked up and he looked down. He bent down and looked between his legs. He refocused his attention on the ladies. He leaned forward and whispered "Maybe."

Hermione admonished the elf. "Dobby! Why would you want to do something like that?"

"Dobby sorry, Miss Hermy! But Dobby couldn't take Master Harry calling Dobby, Master Dobby. It just wasn't right."

Hermione and Tonks were both confused now. "So he stopped calling you Master Dobby?"

Dobby smiled brightly. "Yes Ma'am! Only way to get him to stop was for me to apprentice to him!"

Tonks's brain was being twisted a bit. "What are you apprenticing in Dobby? Can you do wizard magic?"

Dobby admonished the silly caretaker. "No Miss Tonky. Dobby is an elf. Elves can't do wizard magic. Dobby is apprenticing in Cheek, with a minor focus on Impudent Smart-Aleckology."

Tonks and Hermione both looked a little scared. Hermione asked, "And how are your studies coming?"

Dobby smiled. "Very well. Master taught Dobby how to be a cheeky pirate! Dobby's been practicing." Dobby squenched his right eye shut and began shaking his fist at the two staff members. "Avast ye scurvy wenches! Arrrrrrr!"

Hermione looked at Tonks. They shared some silent conversation and both just shook their heads. "We're getting sidetracked here. We came down for some breakfast. Can you help us with that Dobby? Or are there any other elves who would like..." Hermione trailed off and

stopped speaking when the table became completely covered with a veritable buffet for approximately 20 people.

Tonks's eyes were wide. "Thanks guys! This looks great." Many elves blushed, bowed, and nodded before going back to work. The two girls seemed to have agreed to not discuss the previous evening or anything relating to Apprentice Dobby.

The next month passed by awfully quietly. Professor Flamel indicated that he suspected Mr. Potter would be making an appearance over the Christmas break. But in the meantime there were very few reports at all attributed to him. Even the Quibbler had stopped its weekly updates. The occasional article linking him to pregnant witches was still frequently mentioned, but none of them ever followed through with any truth.

Apprentice Dobby had a particularly embarrassing episode where he was given a gift he cherished almost as much as a sit'n'spin. He got his very own egg of silly putty. Dobby was seen playing with it quite frequently, most usually stretched across the top of his head like a flesh colored toupee. It all changed one day when Professor Malfoy tricked Dobby. Dobby was heartbroken when the Headmaster explained that if you eat your silly putty, it will not grow in your belly into a silly putty baby. Nor can it be retrieved in any useful form. Professor Malfoy had to serve detention and apologize to Apprentice Dobby.

It was mid December when Severus sent off an owl to Mr. Longbottom informing him he had finished brewing two complete rounds of doses of the Kiss of Ra. Professor Malfoy took over Potions classes for the day. Professor Granger was a little frustrated she couldn't go with them, but she had classes to teach.

So it was just Neville Longbottom and Severus Snape that entered into the long term care ward of the St. Mungo's to try and administer a mental ailments cure-all that hadn't been seen or made in millennia.

Severus asked the nervous young man. "Are you ready for this Mr. Longbottom? You must realize this potion can only be given once every two weeks and should be administered for up to six months."

“Professor Snape, I know better than to get my hopes too high considering the success the healers have had over the last decade and a half working on my parents. But then again, this is the first suggestion we’ve had from Harry.”

Severus curled his lip into a sneer and was fighting the part of him that also found a great deal of hope and expectations from the involvement of the Golden Boy. Before he could begin cursing the Boy in his head for stealing Severus’s glory Neville again spoke up.

“And anyways sir, even if this potion doesn’t help them, it’s bound to be helpful somewhere else, and you’re still the only Potions Master capable of it.”

Severus tried very hard not to blush and to maintain his sneer.

“Alright, so if it works, what sort of response or results can we expect?”

Severus fought to keep up his evil demeanor. “Did you not read any of the notes Professor Granger provided?”

Neville shook his head. “When Hermione explained it, I was spending more time trying to figure out what her breasts looked like than I was actually listening to her. She can talk for a long time.”

Severus snorted a little and composed himself as quickly as possible. “It is highly likely we may see an immediate response. They may become coherent and communicative within a few minutes. But they will slip back and forget simple things shortly thereafter. The amount of time they are coherent will increase as the potion is re-administered every two weeks, until hopefully at some point they remain coherent permanently. Do not administer more before the two weeks is up. An overdose is far worse than no dose at all, and could be fatal, if there’s still too much of it in their system.”

Neville nodded and was paying closer attention as he had no desire at all to look at Professor Snape’s breasts. “Of course. I will always refer to your expertise on your potions, Sir. So does this mean they might recognize me in just a minute or two?”

Severus genuinely smiled and said “Well let’s find out.”

The two had been cleared with the Healer’s and poured a dose of the potion into Frank Longbottom’s mouth. Frank swallowed the potion as his natural reflex responded. Neville and Severus were standing off to the side, waiting for a response. After a few minutes without him stirring, Severus went ahead and administered a dose to Alice. While his back was turned, Severus heard a hoarse voice behind him.

“Wh-where am I?” Frank asked. “Wh-who are you?” he said looking at Neville.

“Dad! It’s me Neville!” the excited younger Longbottom exclaimed.

“Sorry kid, my son is a bit younger than you are. Now try again, Who are....” Frank’s eyes widened at the older man standing behind Neville. “Snivellus!”

Severus’s smile quickly went away and he rolled his eyes. “Hi Frank.”

“You look like crap!”

Severus scowled viciously at the man and surprisingly held back any biting retorts.

“Why the heck do you look like a hundred years older?”

Neville just started snickering at that and got that scowl directed his way some. “Dad. You’ve been real sick for about 19 years.”

Frank snapped his attention back to Neville. “Neville?”

Neville smiled and nodded. Frank’s eyes began to widen and tear up a little. “Oh my son.” He said and opened his arms asking for a hug. Neville moved towards him and embraced his father tightly. Severus let out a loud audible sigh.

Frank went back to vigilant. “Wait! The Lestranges! And Crouch! And...and Alice. Oh poor Alice. I’m going to kill them!”

Severus just smirked. "Too late."

And again from behind Severus he hears a different hoarse and scratchy voice. "Snivellus?"

"Oh for Merlin's sake people, I'm trying to be nice here!" the angry Slytherin yelled.

Alice blushed. "Sorry Severus. So umm, why are you here and why do you look like old crap?"

Severus decided it would be best to leave young Mr. Longbottom to his family bonding moment. "Neville please apprise them of the situation, I doubt they will remain coherent for too much longer. I will be waiting for you outside."

Severus tried to calmly march out of the ward, with his trademark cloak billowing behind him, when he was interrupted again by another familiar voice.

"Snivellus, was it? Would you like my autograph?"

Severus just whipped his head towards Gilderoy Lockhart and stared at him harshly.

"I have some lovely head shots. I'd be happy to sign one for you."

Severus thought about it briefly and said. "Actually, let me go get a DNR form, and why don't you autograph that for me instead?"

"I could do that I suppose. But I don't want you selling it. But if you must, I'd say hang on to it for at least a couple years. It'll be worth a lot more by then."

Severus smiled a genuine smile again. "With you, it may not even have to wait that long to appreciate."

Neville just shook his head at his departing former Potions professor. Neville began explaining to his parents what had happened in their

attack and what treatment they were getting. He was about to start telling them about the wizarding world since they were attacked, when his father slipped back into a vegetative state. He explained what had happened to his mother just before she did the same. Neville left the ward and caught up with Professor Snape. Before the sneering man could do anything he was being smothered by a hug from a tear-filled young man.

Severus felt absolutely dirty. He just made a pained face, nodded to the smiling and crying Mr. Longbottom, and turned around and ran as fast as he could. For good measure he could be heard cursing Mr. Potter's name quite vividly.

Christmas break was upon Hogwarts. The castle had been emptied of nearly all of the students. The few that remained had just finished a delicious Christmas Eve feast with all the staff members that remained, and many other guests of the school. The students finished their desserts and left to go back to their common rooms. Seated still at the table were many staff members and guests, all who happened to be members of the Order of the Phoenix. One of the people still seated was Headmaster Albus Dumbledore who seemed to be smiling and bouncing in his seat unable to keep still. He was staring at Professor Flamel, begging the older man with his twinkling eyes. Nicholas finally gave in. He cast a large privacy charm around them all and stood up.

"I can see Albus is about to burst, and I am sure he has told a few of you about one of his little gifts this holiday." Nicholas began. Everyone was watching him with rapt attention.

"I have discussed the matter with Mr. Potter, who we are still trying to locate, and after some pleading, a few concessions of my own, I have persuaded him to allow me to share with Albus, and the rest of you, the substance we have been studying."

"Before I do that," several people groaned and started getting impatient, "I first will try and share some of what I can with you."

"When this project first came to me, I really had no idea what it could lead to. I did not expect much, and so, after running some preliminary tests, I can honestly say I was truly shocked at the potential it has."

Severus does in fact have a vial of it, and no, I cannot tell you the password to it.

“We are not ready yet to come forward with our findings or discoveries just yet, as there is a lot of potential misuse available with the substance, and we need to exhaust essentially all the possibilities we can, determining the ways it can be used. There are several distinctly different ways it can be used, and a few of them you have been witness to in their testing form, and may simply have not been aware of it.

“I believe before the school year is up, we will be recruiting some other experts to assist us in this process. Both Professor Snape and Professor Granger’s names have been discussed as candidates. Albus, we agreed you may be a little too excitable for working on this.”

Albus continued smiling and nodding seemingly agreeing with that assessment. “Oh for the love of sugary goodness, just tell us what the substance is!”

Nicholas stared at the impatient old man. “Fine.”

Albus smiled and yelled, “Praise be to Harry!”

Professor Malfoy, purely on impulse, yelled back, “Praise be to Potter!”

Nicholas just shook his head. “Anyways, the substance that as far as I know, only Mr. Potter has ever been able to acquire, doesn’t exactly have a proper name per se, but we have been calling it...”

Nicholas just shook his head. "Anyways, the substance that as far as I know, only Mr. Potter has ever been able to acquire, doesn't exactly have a proper name per se, but we have been calling it..."

CHAPTER TWELVE

"...Dementor Blood."

Nicholas just smiled at the looks of shock and confusion he was getting.

Finally Albus broke the silence. "They can bleed?"

Severus's eyes were wide. "Dementors! They have blood? That's useful? And powerful?"

Nicholas smiled and said, "There are some aspects of Dementors none of us ever could have guessed and only now are they beginning to make sense."

Hermione's brow was furrowed. "Can you elaborate Nicholas? I mean we know next to nothing about Dementors, their origins, how to harm them other than driving them away with a patronus. I would never have considered that they even had blood flowing through their veins or whatever they have similar to veins."

"I am sure most of you remember that the Dementors' loyalties were highly questionable? And you may remember an attack my first year back teaching that involved some rogue Dementors under the Dark Lord's control? Mr. Potter was rumored to have been kissed and just showed back up the next day right as rain? Well apparently then, the Dementors opened communication of sorts with him. In case you were wondering, it was at his request that they solidified their position as prison guards and refused any formal alliances with the Ministry and the Dark Lord."

"I remember that! I asked him how he'd survived being kissed and the cheeky bugger told me he'd kissed the cutie back!" Remus said with wide eyes. "I thought he was just yanking my crank."

“Yes well, I believe there are limits to his ability to communicate with them. It is a shame people do not realize this, but the Dementors are not beings that enjoy or delight in torture and malice. To them it’s as natural and necessary as it is for us to eat, except we almost always kill our sustenance. From what I have gathered, the majority of them are worried about rogues of their own species, and do not wish to be blamed for the actions of a few. So they are submitting themselves to Mr. Potter freely to be studied and their strengths and weaknesses to be determined. For some reason they trust Mr. Potter. And he knew if he approached most of the ‘Light’ side, they would ask for the execution and annihilation of the species before even trying to truly understand them.”

“So have you learned anything more about Dementors that you can tell us?” Tonks asked.

“Certainly. The first and most intriguing part, which may give you some hints as to the focus of parts of our study is that Dementors possess a dormant amount of magic of that affects both time and space. As well as when coupled with certain other elements, providing an entire field of magic involving control and manipulation of time and space in ways we never considered. It is also this that has led us to one theory about their origin.” Nicholas paused and saw he could still command everyone’s attention.

“It is my belief, that the Dementors were created by either a Dark evil wizard, or maybe even muggle, to be a weapon. Or perhaps created out of necessity and they needed beings to withdraw excess emotions from people. I do not believe their existence with us now was intentional. But I suspect that it will be quite a long time in the future before they are actually created, and at some point after that, an aspect of their magic will be affected in such a way as to respond by throwing them back in time.”

Albus’s eyes began to light up with understanding.

Nicholas smiled. “Mr. Potter is not a fan of one possibility, but there is chance that he or perhaps his descendents may be involved in their creation. He is the exception to every rule, but this would possibly explain their affinity for him.”

"You know it could also be that I destroyed the evil creator of them for their sake. I don't have to be the mad scientist." A familiar voice exclaimed from the Dining Hall's door.

"And the incorrigible one decides to show up," Nicholas said without even turning around.

"Harry!" a great number of voices exclaimed and jumped up to tackle the young man.

Tonks and Hermione had been in front and they both smacked headfirst into a barrier and bounced back on their bottoms. Everyone else halted their movements at this. Although Fred and George thought it looked like fun and ran headfirst into the barrier as well.

Nicholas looked ashamed. "Sorry bout that. Potty over there has so little respect for my privacy charms and barriers you may have forgotten I had that one up." A few mumbled spells and waves of his wand and a nearly invisible wall shimmered away.

"Yes, yes. Hello everybody. I wasn't planning on dropping by, but when I heard my ancient partner over there dirtying my good name I felt I had to defend my honor." Harry said smugly.

More than a few people tackled him and surrounded him with hugs. Harry was well aware of the 14 tracers that had just been placed on him too.

"Ancient partner?" an indignant DADA professor smirked. "I'm still young enough to take you to task, oh cheeky one. And while I'm at it, you do realize 'cheeky' is not a compliment."

"Maybe not in the Renaissance old-timer, but I appreciate it just the same. And take me to task? Is that a challenge?"

Nicholas smirked. "I know you showed up to keep me from saying too much more. And I'd bet you came here to show-off as usual too."

Harry grinned evilly. "Think you can handle it? I'll even stick to only using defensive magic on you." Harry's evil grin widened looking at all his friends. "No promises on the rest of these miscreants."

Nicholas looked at the others watching their byplay wondering what would be happening. "No offensive spells at me? Or indirectly at me? Now you're just plain arrogant."

Nicholas drew his wand and pushed everyone else away, and cleared a dueling area between himself and the cheeky brat crashing their party. "Not even going to draw your wand?"

Harry smiled. "Eventually. But first, I thought you'd be interested to see these," Harry put his hands together in front of him palms facing each other, and slowly pulled his hands apart. It looked as though there was an invisible string between his palms, and hanging on the sagging string was approximately two dozen small golden bands.

Nicholas's eyes were wide, "You got the rings working?"

Harry smiled. "Yup. Still needs some tweaking, but they do work. And I threw in a few extra tricks into them too."

Nicholas had an idea what was coming, but the rest of the Order had just pulled up chairs and were sitting in a row waiting to watch the upcoming exhibition.

Nicholas snapped into action, and cast a numbing charm at Harry first. Harry was way too quick, and Nicholas thought there would be a good chance his first spell would be coming back at him, so he chose one he could counter immediately.

Harry saw the spell speeding towards him, and pulled his hands back from the rings floating in front of him. He grabbed onto the left most ring with his right hand, and the right most ring with his left hand, and whipped his hands across his body, sending all the rings careening forward into a variety of directions and locations. The spell went straight through the front ring and came flying out the ring above it back in Nicholas's direction. Nicholas was able to easily dodge it.

The Order wasn't sure what they were seeing, but all the rings, Harry had just conjured all had settled into positions around the dueling area and were floating in space. Except for two, which Harry held onto one in each hand. All the rings were now about a foot in diameter, and appeared as simply hollow golden colored metal bands.

Nicholas cast a strong shield onto himself, and threw a half dozen sick fast stunners straight towards Harry. Two rings swooped down in the path of the spells, each one gobbling up two stunners. The rings closest to Nicholas tilted themselves to affect the angle that the stunners came screaming out of them straight back at Nicholas. He dodged the four stunners the rings had reflected back at him. Nicholas looked up and saw the last two stunners appeared to be bouncing back and forth between the two rings Harry was holding in front him. It almost looked like a red light saber stretched across the rings Harry was holding. Nicholas was getting nervous, and it felt a bit like the stunners were draining his magic somehow.

Harry turned the two rings sideways, and whipped his front hand up allowing one of the stunners to come straight back at Nicholas. He dodged to the left, and felt the other stunner slam into his shield from behind him. Apparently while playing with the stunners, Harry had maneuvered another ring almost directly behind Nicholas and sent the sixth stunner straight at his position if he dodged the fifth stunner.

"Very impressive, Harry. But this is what you had already discussed with me. What sort of tricks have you got?"

Harry smiled. "I've been working on a muggle disarmer I could try."

Nicholas raised an eyebrow. "How is it muggle?"

Harry got a serious look on his face. "Okay, now watch carefully." He began swinging his left arm in a circle, and was making some ridiculous hand motions. Only Harry knew they were gang signs. In truth, this was merely the distraction while another ring snuck up next to Nicholas. Harry was flinging his left arm up and down, and yelled "Abracadabra Alakazam!" And he quickly stuck his other hand straight through the ring it had been holding. His right hand appeared, coming out of the ring next to Nicholas, and quickly plucked the wand

straight out of Nicholas's hand and retreated back to Harry's own body. Harry got his self-satisfied smirk, and said "Ta-da!" before taking a bow.

Nicholas was now wandless and could see he was overmatched. "This isn't even going to be fun, is it? The rings are too much of an advantage right now."

Harry smiled. "It might be fun."

Nicholas was shaking his head. "Remember no offensive magic at me directly or indirectly."

Harry said, "True." And cast a stunner straight towards Nicholas. Nicholas leapt to his left to avoid it, but his movement was unnecessary. A ring swooped down before the spell was even halfway, caught the stunner, and sent it out another ring hovering behind the audience. Moody took the spell in the back and fell forward unconscious.

Harry's eyes went wide. "Whoops. Okay. No one wakes him till I'm gone."

Nicholas was chuckling. "He needs to work on his motto it looks like."

Harry shrugged. "I thought he'd block it."

"But just for show..." Harry trailed off and quickly cast about 30 conjured snowballs and was hitting all the Order members with them through rings surrounding them. No one managed to shield themselves completely, though Albus was snowball free. Unfortunately Albus had missed the voice changing curse, when he was protecting himself from physical objects and conjured objects.

A number of wet Order members were cursing Harry's name, and discussing the possibilities with these rings, while Nicholas and Harry were laughing at them. The Headmaster calmly stood up, proud to be dry, and said "Very impressive, Harry." Unfortunately Albus didn't expect to sound like a 4 year old little girl, and he was subjected to some mocking laughter from his colleagues.

Albus cast a few spells at himself until he had countered the change in voice. "As I was saying, very impressive, Harry. Does this mean we are going to see you a lot more frequently?"

Harry just shrugged. "Doubtful. I've got a number of things keeping me busy and being a public figure is not one of them. I've been around quite a bit, even if it hasn't exactly been on the front lines, as Tonky, Hermy, and Nicky can attest to."

Harry maneuvered the rings, and stuck his hand through one in front of him and put Professor Flamel's wand into the Professor's pocket. "I'm five feet away you show off. You could just hand it to me."

"True, but it seems whenever I call you Nicky you try to hurt me, so I took the Slytherin way out."

Severus rolled his eyes. "More like the coward's way."

Harry winked at him, "You said it. Not me."

Severus shook his head. "Will you just tell me the password?"

Harry looked at him surprised. "You haven't guessed it yet?"

Severus sneered. "I guessed that the password was in parseltongue. Nothing I could try worked."

Harry raised an eyebrow. "You never thought to try 'I love Harry Potter'?"

"I did try that!"

Harry started laughing. "Good to know."

Severus closed his eyes and breathed deeply. "You know how I feel about this sort of language but ... please, Mr. Potter?"

Harry shook his head. "You sound more and more like a Gryffindor every day. Next thing you know Albus will have you talking about friends."

Severus tried to let nothing show, but Albus bursting out in laughter did not help matters for him.

"Alright, Alright. I'll tell you. The password is: The Slytherinest Snivellus sycophantically sicced sieve-sided scythes on succulent succubae for six sickles." Harry said with a proud smile.

"What the! Oh come on! That's not a password, that's a pass-sentence."

Harry just raised an eyebrow at him. "The point of a password is to prevent people from getting into somewhere. Albus just does it to annoy people and declare his love of sweets."

Severus shook his head. "And calling me names. That's just low."

Harry retorted, "Are you telling me you never made any guesses at the password involving that particular moniker?"

Severus frowned. "That's not the point."

"And anyways...you're deifying me!" Harry yelled back with faux anger and a smile.

"Yeah but you made the password way before that!" Severus explained.

"Yeah but you thought it first!" Harry countered.

"No I-" Severus stopped himself and shook his head. "That doesn't count!"

"I was always informed that it is the thought that counts."

Severus snarled at the argumentative brat.

Harry decided to mollify his snarky friend. "Speaking of gifts, I heard you made the potion to help Neville's parents. Congratulations. You know a little further research and then publish your findings and I would suspect you'd be a shoe-in for an Order of Merlin."

Severus's eyes flickered at the thought of the award he'd been dying to receive just so he could rub it in his dad's face. Well, if his dad were still alive that is. But then realizing he would be there because of Potter's help takes the fun out of anything.

"Anyways people. Lovely seeing you all and I hope you appreciated the little demonstration. Don't be too hard on Nicholas." Harry pretended to whisper to them all. "He's really old and almost as barmy as Albus."

Harry smiled and continued in a regular voice. "But I unfortunately must be off, before any of you figure out a way to actually sneak an unknown tracer onto me."

More than a couple Order members' faces betrayed their emotions.

"Apprentice Dobby!" Harry called out.

Dobby appeared in a crack. "Master Harry! Merry Christmas!" He hugged Harry around the legs while Harry just smiled. "I have other plans for your gift, Apprentice Dobby, but in the meantime, I did get you this." And he happily presented Dobby with a new egg of silly putty.

Dobby took the gift with tears in his eyes, and was muttering things like "greatest ... funnest ... greatest ... master."

Harry just said, "Happy Holidays," winked, snapped his fingers, and popped away. In his wake were a number of presents with people's names on them.

Nicholas let his senses out a bit. "Okay, so is everybody's tracer in Dobby's silly putty now? Or just the two I did?"

Albus nodded with a frown. "Silly putty, I'm pretty sure."

A few other Order members nodded and agreed.

Nicholas sighed and looked at everyone. "Should it be embarrassing at all to be shown up consistently by an impertinent child?"

Albus, Severus, Tonks, and Hermione all said "Yes." Nicholas just laughed.

Albus asked, "Nicholas?"

"Yes?"

"Those rings..."

"I cannot talk about them."

"Are they somehow linked subspaces capable of transporting magic?"

"Cannot talk."

"But they allowed physical passage of his arm."

"Not saying a word."

"And he was able to control which ones they come out of so effortlessly."

"La-di-da-di-la."

"He could catch and re-aim a spell with just a thought."

"Flintstones, meet the Flintstones."

"I mean you could theoretically catch a killing curse, and substitute another ring in a-"

"For the love of Merlin, Albus, shut up!"

The Headmaster bowed his head. "Sorry."

“He obviously was willing to show off his new toy, so you’re welcome to theorize all you want. Please just leave me out of it.”

Nicholas looked at the variety of awe, frustration, and humor on people’s faces. “Anyways, I know it’s only Christmas Eve, but who wants to see what Harry left for us all?”

The excitable elf, playing with his silly putty, raised his hand.

Albus noticed him immediately and said, “Yes Dobby?”

“I will hand out the gifts for people. And I have some to give to a few of you.”

Dobby began handing out the gifts to people. Each time he got to someone who had given Master Harry a tracer, Dobby gave them the tracer back with a bright smile. He would then wink a giant eye at them and say ‘Merry Christmas.’ His cheek training was really beginning to pay some dividends. Dobby merely placed the gift on the top of the still stunned Mad-Eye Moody. Apparently only Albus and Nicholas appreciated their gifts from Dobby. Nicholas even quickly conjured a rubber, house elf sized pirate sword and gave it in return to Dobby. Dobby hugged his legs and cried.

Hermione opened her gift and groaned out loud. She had received a muggle notepad titled ‘Grocery List’ at the top of every page. More than a couple people were laughing.

Tonks opened a large box and was a bit frustrated to have received her old telly. And it appeared it had been fixed since she threw it out the window.

Albus didn’t understand his gift at all. It took a brightly blushing Hermione almost five minutes to properly explain what Viagra was. Tonks eating a banana didn’t help matters.

Nicholas opened his box and pulled out a large golden ring. He was examining and everyone was watching him, wondering what would be on the other side of his ring. Nicholas took a deep breath, and

plunged his right arm into the ring. It only took a split-second for Tonks to jump out of her seat screaming like a banshee. From on her seat, the rest of the Order spotted another ring she apparently had been sitting on and a quickly retreating hand.

Nicholas began to apologize. "Miss Tonks I am so sorry. I really should have known better with that cheeky brat."

Tonks heart rate calmed down significantly and she started to feel safe again. "No worries. Sorry if I scared you a bit there too."

Nicholas shook his head. "No need to apologize to me. I'm just curious," he paused wondering if this question might offend her, "why aren't you wearing any underwear?"

Tonks blushed as bad as Hermione had earlier and shrugged. "Laundry day."

Nicholas observed the young woman and made a suggestion. "You know you can just use magic and clean them."

Tonks's blush seemed to lessen and she responded, "Look, I'll be frank-"

"No, no, my dear! Don't be frank. Be curt. But go ahead." Nicholas interrupted her.

Tonks eyes visibly slowed down and her thought process seemed to be grinding to a halt. "Okay..." Like most people, when confused turn to Hermione for help. Tonks looked over at Hermione and had a pleading look on her face. Hermione had no clue what to do so she just scowled and flipped Tonks off. This seemed to remind Tonks of what she was talking about. "Anyways, as I was saying, Frank, Curt, or Nicholas, I'm just not a good person if my britches ain't snuggly soft."

Nicholas smiled like a proper dirty old man. "Good to know."

A few more people were beginning to dig into their presents when the school's resident healer called out from down the hallway. "Albus? Are you in there?" She appeared to be on her way to the Great Hall.

Nicholas had an idea. He turned to Albus and said, "Shhh. Watch this." The DADA professor then walked over to the ring sitting on Tonk's seat. He dropped the ring that he had been gifted, over his head like a necklace. After he'd readjusted to looking at the world from a detached point of view, he used his body's hands and picked up the ring carrying his own head. He ran towards the entrance to the hall yelling out, "Madame Pomphrey! Madame Pomphrey! I've had a little accident!"

The matron took one look at the headless professor and went completely pale. She completely collapsed in a dead faint when the detached head asked her, "Do you have a band-aid?"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

It was now late February, and Professor Snape and Professor Granger were arguing in the Headmaster's office about a potential hire for next year.

"I read the newest handbook, Albus! I know my rights!" the irate dark haired man exclaimed.

Professor Granger tried to calm him. "Severus, you are being ridiculous. Every other member of the staff is prepared to welcome him with open arms."

Albus just chuckled at the byplay the two were having.

"I'm telling you now, if you hire that boy, I will press charges. It says quite clearly, that our incident would fall under the rules of sexual harassment. It would be grounds for his immediate dismissal. Spare him the embarrassment and just hire someone else."

Hermione shook her head at the complete ridiculousness of her colleague.

Albus spoke up, "First, Severus, that incident was months ago, and far before he was ever a co-worker of yours. And second, speaking as the Head of the Wizengamot, I can assure you no trial would ever find a hug of gratitude to be sexual harassment."

Hermione narrowed her eyes. "Why are you being so irrational about this?"

"I know a bad touch when I feel it!" Severus sneered before falling into a resigned sigh. "If you must know, after I had my Dark Mark removed and the Dark Lord was gone, I was curious what my greatest fear was, and what a boggart would turn into before me. It wasn't until just last month that I encountered a boggart and discovered what it was." He briefly looked up at both Albus and Hermione before dropping his head again. "If you must know, it turns into Mr. Longbottom. He has his beefy arms open and out in an effort to touch me inappropriately."

This year had taken a toll on both Albus and Hermione, and Hermione was able to keep herself from laughing out loud with no problems at all. Albus, managed to restrain himself in some ways, but was not about to let an opportunity like this pass him up. He extended his hands out and up towards his Potions professor and said, "Severus? Would you like to practice hugging?"

Severus snapped his head up and just sneered at the Headmaster. His biting retort was interrupted by someone barging into the Headmaster's office.

All three were quite surprised to see it was the Headmaster, Albus Dumbledore. He addressed the man sitting behind his desk. "Mr. Potter. This has gone on long enough." He said loudly and proudly while drawing his wand on the man. The 'Albus' at the desk just began chuckling. Severus and Hermione both quickly drew their wands and were pointing them at the laughing man behind the desk.

The Albus behind the desk was still smiling and looking at the two Professors and man who had just entered his office. The Albus Dumbledore who had just barged into the office started cracking up, much to the surprise of the two Professors holding their Headmaster at wand point. "Man you guys are too easy sometimes."

Severus and Hermione both turned back to the newcomer who had by now morphed into the more familiar guise of Harry Potter. Harry was still chuckling and the Headmaster was smiling.

Albus spoke first. "Welcome Harry. This is a pleasant surprise."

"Likewise Albus. I didn't think you'd mind if I enlisted the aid of a couple of your staff members." Harry responded with a smile.

Hermione's eyes lit up like Christmas had come. "You're bringing us into the project?"

Severus just raised an eyebrow and observed his reluctant youngest Master.

"I do have a couple tasks I was hoping you could assist me with in development. Completely voluntarily of course. As Albus can tell you, things like this are a thankless job."

Albus nodded. "I never would have finished my work with dragon's blood were it not for the groupies."

The other three looked at him a bit curiously.

"Mr. Potter, you know for sure neither I, nor Miss Granger would ever pass up this opportunity. I'm curious why you are here propositioning us and not your partner." Severus intoned with his usual Slytherin guile.

"Who? Old St. Nick? He's probably busy thinking up ways to torture muggle children, by jumping into random fireplaces through illegal floo installations. Krissy's not just for Christmas anymore! Dun-dun-dun." Harry finished melodically.

Albus added, "I hope not. He should be teaching a class right now. Fourth year Gryffindors and Ravenclaws, if memory serves."

"Okay. He might be doing that instead. But he's probably thinking about torturing muggle children." Harry responded with a knowing smirk.

Albus looked at Harry carefully. "You're too smug right now. What do you know that I don't?"

Harry sighed. "Albus, you're quite old, and I'm not sure you have enough time left for a conversation of that magnitude."

Albus frowned playfully. "Oh hush child."

Harry shrugged with a smile. "I don't really know anything, I just happen to have faith in the DADA curse. It helped make me the man I am today."

Albus frowned at the thought he was going to need another DADA teacher. Nicholas had made no indications that he was leaving, but

he hadn't necessarily indicated he was staying either. He did have a significant project going on.

"Anyways, Severus, I was hoping you could look into modifying many existing potions through the addition of Dementor Blood. I found one very useful way to use it. When added in the right quantities to a Polyjuice potion, it makes the transformation permanent, until a counter potion is consumed."

Severus looked thoughtful considering the implications of this. "Theoretically then, if you had a hair or skin sample from before a disfiguring accident, you could take the potion and appear normal?"

Harry nodded. "Or simply take one of yourself, and appear to never age." He nodded towards the Headmaster, "Or grow ridiculous looking large white beards."

Harry continued. "The tricky part is that the Dementor blood adds a very powerful, but essentially neutral component to the potion. It takes a precise combination of phoenix tears and basilisk venom to be able to equal that neutrality and counter the power of the Dementor Blood."

Severus retorted, "Those are not exactly ingredients I have in excess to experiment a lot with. They are quite expensive."

Harry nodded. "Yup, that's why I brought you these." He pulled out from his cloak, two large gallon sized milk jugs full of murky clear liquid. One was labeled "Phoenix Tears" and the other was "Basilisk Venom."

Albus looked at the size of them "Good lord! You drained a few dozen of them dry."

Harry just rolled his eyes. "If you need anything else, or large quantities of other materials for experimentation, just let Nicholas know. I can often find the necessary resources when asked."

Severus nodded, and was eager to begin. He grabbed the two jugs of phoenix tears and basilisk venom and began to head out of the office.

Harry cleared his throat and Severus turned back with a curious look on his face.

Harry raised an eyebrow. "Aren't you forgetting something?"

Severus looked down and saw he had the venom and tears, and couldn't think of anything else. Harry rolled his eyes, and pulled out two more gallon sized jugs containing the black liquid entitled Dementor Blood.

Severus looked ashamed and said, "Oh. Right. Sorry."

Harry smirked, "Sorry? You say 'sorry'?" He just shook his head. "What happened to you?"

Severus scowled and sneered in his more familiar manner and took his jugs of Dementor Blood as well. As he was departing eagerly to his dungeons he heard Mr. Potter yell out a parting, "Complete secrecy on your work. Feel free to include Professor Malfoy, but complete secrecy for both of you on this."

Harry was chuckling when he heard a yelled back, "Yeah, yeah, yeah."

Hermione was nearly bouncing in her chair waiting for her assignment.

"Alright Hermione, and you, I would like to be in charge of my morning coffee." Harry said with a straight face. "I do not want black, I like cream and I like sugar but in the proper amou-" That was as far as Harry got before Hermione had punched him in the shoulder so hard he whimpered.

"Egads, woman. Fine. See if I stick my wand up the nose of the next person to attack you." Harry pouted playfully.

"Come on Harry! Give me some Dementor blood! Tell me what to focus on! Study! Study! Study!" Hermione whined.

Harry turned to Albus. "Does MENSA have cheerleaders encouraging people at meetings?"

Albus shook his head. "Not anymore. There was an incident and part of my plea bargain includes being unable to discuss this any further."

Harry snickered. Hermione looked horrified, confused, and unable to tell if the Headmaster was being serious. "Alright Hermione, I've worked out some of the basic arithmantic implications of Dementor Blood, but I thought you would like to completely map it out. Primarily I need to determine the limitations on its storage abilities, and honestly, if there are any limitations. Including degradation over time. I haven't looked into whether there was any ancient research on the subject, since we're not sure when the Dementors first showed up, but it might be worth consulting your old grocery list just in case."

Hermione was tired of feeling guilty for that and just nodded. Harry handed her a notebook, and a vial of the blood.

"I doubt you will need even this much of a physical sample, but Nicholas can get you more. The notebook is linked with one of mine in a way similar to the Magical Tome of Alexandria. My notes are accessible to you, when I choose them to be, and yours will be accessible to me, when you commit them. There is also a linking charm allowing written conversations on occasion. If you need to speak with me, commit a note requesting a date and time, and we can talk that way."

Harry smiled at his friend, and said "Good afternoon Hermione. Albus, I'm afraid I must be going." Harry noticed a familiar dish on a shelf. "Hey Albus, did you not like the Hot Tamales?"

Albus raised an eyebrow, "Hot Tamales?"

Harry responded. "Yeah, Hot Tamales. The candy in the never-ending dish I had Peeves give you. I find them to be scrumptious and thought you might appreciate them as an alternative to the tasty sensations of the lemon drops."

Albus eyebrows jumped and he smiled. "I never even realized it was another self-filling dish."

"It has more uses than protecting the family jewels you know." Harry added.

Albus blushed and nodded.

"Later guys. And definitely hire Neville. He'll be brilliant, I'm sure of it. And after he accepts the position, tell him about Severus's boggart. That's too much irony for Neville to discover naturally. He might burst." And the annoyingly common wink, finger snap, and pop, and Harry was gone once again.

Tonks had grown impatient. There had been many minor pranks and she had been fondled under mysterious circumstances more times than she could count. She had met up with Hermione and Nicholas a number of times, and they had no leads at all towards Harry. Tonks knew that Hermione was doing some work on Harry and Nicholas's project, and that she had a way to contact him.

She met up with Professor Granger and Professor Flamel. "Alright guys. I know you can contact him, Hermione. And you can help us set the trap, Nicholas. We need to knowingly draw him here. And leave it up to me to subdue him."

Hermione raised an eyebrow. "Subdue him? How are you planning to do that? It seems unlikely a stunner or just about anything magical would work."

Nicholas nodded. "I'm curious what method you intend to use as well."

Tonks looked pensive and serious. "If magic doesn't seem to work, I'll do it the muggle way." She smiled brightly. "I'll snog him senseless."

Hermione just guffawed at her friend. Nicholas nodded his head. "You know that just might work actually. It's worth a shot."

Hermione looked at Nicholas. "Alright. So how do we get him here?"

Nicholas was thinking. "We need a reason for him to be present. And it cannot be research you have done Hermione because that would just be transmitted through the journals. Perhaps we should mention we have something he needs to see. A demonstration of sorts. It should be project related, but nothing that can be communicated through notes and analysis."

Tonks nodded eagerly. "We only need to make him think there's something to see. We don't have to actually have something."

Hermione nodded. "True. But it has to have enough basis in fact, to draw him out."

Nicholas was thinking. "Perhaps, something discovered by accident. You spilled a drop of your vial somewhere and something miraculous happened."

Tonks thought and said, "Maybe it's a delicious seasoning for cooking?"

Hermione and Nicholas both looked at her and understood why she was not part of the research team on this project. "Interesting. But not quite what we're looking for."

They all sat in silence for a while and Nicholas suggested. "Perhaps we should make no mentions, but merely allude to the fact that this is something he needs to see to be able to understand. Giving no reason will be more effective than a poor reason."

Tonks and Hermione agreed. They made a plan for the Saturday before Easter. The three of them made sure to make no mentions of the plan to anyone else. Nicholas was to back up Hermione's claims that this was something Harry needed to see, and then it was up to Tonks and her feminine wiles to trap and control the feisty boy.

Saturday morning found Hermione having a discussion through her book with Harry asking him to come by, so he could see something revolutionary. Harry agreed, and mentioned he had to run a couple errands, but that he would come by her office at 3:00 PM.

Nicholas and Hermione were relaxing at her desk, when precisely at three o'clock there was a knock on the door. Professor Snape entered and noticed Tonks crouched in the corner waiting to spring. He looked over at the two other professors, pointed at the odd Caretaker and asked, "What's Tonky doing?"

Tonks took that as all the proof she needed and she tackled the greasy man to the floor and began snogging him and rubbing up against him for all she was worth. The slightly horrified Potions professor gave in to her ministrations and began to snog her back just as forcefully.

A curious Harry Potter walked into the room, noticed Tonks on the floor making out with Professor Snape and just raised his eyebrows and muttered, "I'll come back later." He swiftly left the room and disappeared.

An absolutely horrified Tonks leapt off the greasy man and began casting spells to cleanse her mouth. A frustrated Snape narrowed his eyes and angrily muttered, "Tease."

Nicholas and Hermione were holding in their laughter as best as they could.

Tonks yelled, "Snivellus!" before she started gagging and casting water spells into her mouth and on her face.

Snape rolled his eyes, "I've been trying to be nice to people, and every time I get called that in return."

Snape finally stood up and looked at the other three people. He was wiping excess fruity smelling lip gloss off his face and said, "You know I never even considered it as a seasoning for cooking," He smiled and smirked. "And not even I would subject my little Tonky to snogging Severus." A familiar wink and he disappeared with a pop.

Tonks stopped casting water spells into her mouth and smiled a bit at being 'his little Tonky'. Nicholas quickly looked at both girls. "How did he know that. We were in my room. My room is safe from listening

charms and bugs, even those created with the new Dementor Blood. One of us had to have told him somehow.”

Hermione shook her head. “He knew exactly what we were doing the whole time. My goodness. It’s like the never-ending cheek. I feel like we’ve been permanently cursed to be unable to find him.”

Nicholas was still upset. “Which of you discussed the plan in insecure areas? He should not have been able to figure this out.”

Hermione and Tonks were shaking their heads. Tonks spoke up, “I never mentioned the plan to anyone or even thought about it aloud. The only discussions I had were with you two, and that was always in Nicholas’s room.”

Hermione nodded. “Same here.”

Nicholas seemed to calm down. He sighed and looked at the two younger women. “I’m tempted to admit that he’s too good.”

Hermione got a bit fired up. “No way! You can’t give up! You’re our best shot at finding him! We need you Nicholas.”

Tonks was still a bit smug at having snogged the bejeebus out of Harry.

The three called it a day. Tonks got her snogging, and they were all shown up, as per usual.

It was nearing the end of the year now, and there had been no signs pointing to whatever Harry was up to, or where he was. Hermione was getting a bit antsy. Her research had been progressing well, as had Professor Snape’s. Both of them usually just talked with Nicholas about the work whenever they felt like it.

But today, Hermione was in Nicholas’s office thinking about Harry some more. Wondering why he kept being able to get one over on them. She knew Harry was good. But she had a nagging feeling she was missing something. She voiced her suspicions to Nicholas.

“Nicholas, I know Harry is around here somewhere. I’ve been watching every student for anything remotely abnormal, and I cannot find anything pointing to him. I think he’s in the school most of the time. I would have sworn he was making some hidden camp in the Chamber of Secrets, but I had two different ghosts check it out, and they said there was nothing down there or signs anyone had been since I graduated.”

Nicholas nodded and agreed. “I agree. I think he is here, and he is enjoying every minute that we waste trying to figure out what he is up to. Here, I found a couple things in a muggle magazine you might appreciate.”

Hermione took the periodical and opened it to the page Nicholas had marked. She gasped and started laughing her head off. It was an ad for a hair loss product. The male in the ad was Draco Malfoy, and seeing him with a shiny dome topped head, and smidgeons of bleach blonde hair on the sides was just too perfect looking. He had a bright smile, and the picture identified him as Draco Malfoy, former model. Hermione was already making plans for a poster sized blow-up of the ad.

When she turned to the next marked page, she found an ad for male enhancement supplements. It featured what appeared to be a large team of female beach volleyball players around a giant towel they were shaking like a trampoline and thrusting Albus Dumbledore up in to the air. The smile on his face left little doubt as to the point of the ad.

The last marked page made her drop the magazine in fright. She was imagining the rage it would incite. The picture was of a scowling hook-nosed greasy haired man, frowning fervently. A small tear was falling out of one eye. It listed the signs of depression and where to turn for help. Hermione made note of the magazine and made plans to buy up as many copies as she could.

“I wonder who did these.” Hermione asked with a roll of her eyes.

Nicholas shook his head with a smile. “It’s a mystery to me. I really have no idea who in the world it could be.”

Hermione noticed something sitting on one of Professor Flamel's shelves. She went over to investigate. It was certainly out of place at Hogwarts. She picked up the muggle DVD off his shelf.

"The Princess Bride?" Hermione asked. "Why do you have this here?"

Nicholas smiled and explained. "It was a gift from Mr. Potter. Have you ever seen the movie?"

Hermione shook her head. "Nope. Should I?"

Nicholas's eyes twinkled like sparklers. "I think you may find it enlightening."

Hermione wasn't about to worry about being subtle here. "What do you know? Is there a clue about Harry in this?" Hermione was getting excited about a potential clue.

Nicholas smiled and said. "It's more something Harry noticed and thought I would appreciate, than it is anything about Harry. In fact, it would probably be more a clue about me than necessarily one about Harry. By all means, see if you can figure it out though. Very enjoyable movie nonetheless."

Hermione's face fell a bit. She was curious to learn more about her former DADA professor, but she was really hoping to have something on Harry.

Nicholas could read the emotions on her face quite easily. "I assure you, Miss Granger. You will not regret watching the movie."

Hermione smiled and nodded. "If you don't mind me borrowing it, I think I'll visit my parents this weekend and see if I can figure out what that twisted boy had to say about you."

"Good luck, Hermione." A smug old man said to the young woman leaving the room.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

“Professor Flamel? Do you have a minute?” Hermione asked.

“Certainly Professor Granger. What can I do for you?” the jovial old man responded.

Hermione looked a bit worried and shy. “I ... I watched the movie like you advised. And I-” She was a little nervous. “I wanted to thank you for thinking I have perfect breasts, but I really don’t thi-”

And she was rudely interrupted by Professor Flamel’s loud braying laughter.

Hermione was beginning to question her analysis of the movie.

Nicholas looked up at her, and saw the frustration on Hermione’s face and laughed even louder.

Hermione was now beginning to think that Nicholas was a bit of an arse.

“I apologize, Hermione.” Nicholas was still snickering some. “I was laughing because you misunderstood my motives for advising you to watch the movie. I didn’t mean to imply anything about your breasts. They are quite lovely in fact.”

Hermione frowned. “But not perfect?”

Nicholas looked thoughtful and quickly responded. “Well, they’re a very nice size, and shape, but your nipples are a bit high in their location on the breast.”

Hermione was a bit shocked to be getting such a thorough explanation. Complete with scientific hand gestures.

“But you know in about a decade or so, once you’ve completely grown into them, and gravity starts them sagging a little, they’ll be centered right up, and then they’ll be perfect.” Nicholas finished with a nod and a smile.

Hermione thought she might need to thank Neville for the boggart prank some more later. "Oh. Well in that case, I have no idea what I was supposed to get from that movie. I watched it three times, and I was less than fifty percent on the perfect breasts, but it scored the highest on my likelihood factor averages."

"You really are that anal retentive aren't you?"

"What!"

Nicholas quickly looked to his left and his right. "I didn't say anything. I mean, 'perfect breasts' was a funny part, and there's no one claiming that yours are anything less than lovely. But there were a couple of clues I was wondering if you might pick up on." Nicholas explained.

Hermione reluctantly allowed the change of conversation. "So what did you want me to pick up on?"

Nicholas winced a bit. "You know, I'd like to tell you, but this is a big one, and would require me to put a special much stronger secrecy oath on you. So I guess you're just going to have to accept not knowing this one."

"This is that big a deal?"

Nicholas nodded.

"Well, if you knew me as well as my best friends do, then you'd know I would never accept not knowing something."

Nicholas smiled like a Cheshire cat. "Good to know."

Hermione narrowed her eyes at Nicholas's smile. "So hit me with your super mega secrecy spell. And then tell me the big deal."

Nicholas waved his wand and a brilliant purple glob flew out the tip, floated into a webbing around the two professors, and the collapsed inward inside Professor Flamel.

Hermione blinked. "Holy moly. That was a wicked feeling. What's the difference with this spell?"

Nicholas smiled. "This one completely restricts all efforts to share the secured knowledge, but it is completely controlled by the caster's will. So any time, if you wanted to share this with someone else, I merely allow or deny it. It is far more secure, it's just frowned upon, since it might be a tad dark."

Hermione yelped. "What!"

Nicholas chewed on the inside of his cheek, thinking. "It is a measure of controlling another's free will I suppose. But it's a very minor one. It could be easily misused though."

Hermione slowed her breathing and relaxed. "This better be a good secret. So come on. Share."

Nicholas cast a number of privacy, locking, silencing, and muting charms. He then leaned back and smiled. "Tell me Hermione. Do you remember the main character in the movie?"

Hermione nodded. "Westley."

Nicholas nodded. "Exactly. Westley. But he wasn't just Westley, was he?"

Hermione thought about what Nicholas was saying. "You mean the Dread Pirate Roberts, don't you?"

Nicholas nodded. "I do. Westley was the Dread Pirate Roberts, but he was also Westley. Dread Pirate Roberts was just a name that served a purpose. That was handed down and worked for as long as it was kept a secret."

Hermione was looking curiously at Nicholas. "Yeah, it's a good idea, but I still don't see where you're going with this?"

Nicholas's eyes were in overdrive twinkling now. "Harry bought this movie because of some parallels. One of which, was I remember in my sixth year, when I stayed after my first DADA class, and my professor, a mentor of sorts, who behind closed doors I called Westley, asked me," Nicholas leaned forward and was looking straight at Hermione. "How would you like to be the next Nicholas Flamel?"

Hermione's brain snapped into action. Grabbing and piecing all the bits of the puzzle together. Tonks saying she saw Harry in The Princess Bride. The costume choice of pirate at the Halloween Dance. Nicholas received a muggle DVD as a gift. Later he asked if anyone had gotten curious gifts. Nicholas who thought Harry was at the Order meeting. Nicholas swearing he only ever sensed three people in the room. Never mentioned sensing two of himself. Nicholas being one of the only three people who could have ruined the last trap. Nicholas, who swore that Harry was in the castle. Nicholas, who agreed Harry has been using a time turner to appear in multiple places at once. Nicholas, who said Harry is enjoying every minute we waste looking for him. Harry saying "Good to know." Nicholas saying "Good to know." Hermione saying "Well, if you knew me as well as my best friends do, then you'd know I would never accept not knowing something." Nicholas smiling like the cat that got the canary and again saying. "Good to know." Nicholas, who keeps hiding behind secrecy spells 'Harry' placed on him. Nicholas, who's in charge of finding Harry.

A pale and frightened Hermione slowly turned to Nicholas. "Harry?"

Nicholas just flashed a horribly lecherous grin and said, "Hiya Hermy."

All the blood rushed to her head, and her last thought before passing out was 'I hate you, Harry Potter.'

Nicholas just smiled and stunned his best female friend for good measure. He was supposed to be meeting with Albus in a minute, and he didn't want Hermione to go anywhere before they could finish their conversation. So he tucked her into a bed, and popped up to an empty alcove near the Headmaster's office.

“Come in Nicholas.”

“Thank you Albus. Ooooh! Are those Hot Tamales?” Nicholas asked eyeing the red candies on Albus’s desk.

Albus smiled. “Oh yes. Please help yourself. I find they are a refreshingly tasty counterpart to lemon drops.”

Nicholas put on his innocent face. “You know Hot Tamales are probably my favorite muggle candy.” He popped two in his mouth and was relishing the taste.

Albus jumped right into it. “Now what’s this I hear about you maybe not coming back next year? I thought you would be willing to take the post for a while.”

“I took this job again partially because I was bored, and partially just as a favor to you, Albus. I would like you to try and find a suitable replacement though. If by mid-August you do not have a qualified applicant for the position, I will most likely relent and take the job again. But to be honest, I’m a fan of the curse. The DADA curse is one of the staples to Hogwarts life. It’s kinda like Peeves. It’s not particularly helpful, but it’s just a naturally accepted part of its overall charm. It’d be like killing off a little piece of Hogwarts’ soul.”

Albus just shook his head and rolled his eyes. “I cannot agree with your reasons, but I will look for a replacement.”

“Thank you, Albus. Who knows, if no one else, maybe we can talk Harry into taking the position.” Nicholas suggested.

Albus was smiling. “Speaking of Harry,” Albus face dropped dead serious. “What do you know?”

Nicholas’s eyes widened at the quick change in demeanor. “Albus you know all the good stuff that I may or may not know I cannot tell you.”

Albus thinned his lips. "I know. And that's why I've decided to call in my life-debt. I saved your life directly from a Grindelwald attack, and I will submit to any of your necessary memory charms or secrecy spells just so I can know this horribly annoying secret."

Nicholas snorted, "Really?"

Albus nodded dead serious. "Really."

Nicholas was a bit wary. "Okay, but I'm going to have to put you on an imperio based knowledge suppression hex."

Albus raised an eyebrow.

"But for you, I think I also might be able to remove an old memory charm you are unaware you have."

Albus's eyes showed surprise. "Now I'm even more curious. Please, do as you feel necessary."

Nicholas again cast a purple bubble that expanded around them and then collapsed into Nicholas. "Now, what would you like to know?"

Albus settled into his chair. He began watching Nicholas thoughtfully. "Do you know where Harry Potter is?"

Nicholas was smiling a bit. He nodded, "Yes."

Albus steepled his hands together and leaned forward. "Where is Harry Potter?"

Nicholas looked up at the Headmaster. "Are you sure you want to know?"

The Headmaster nodded mournfully.

Nicholas snickered a bit. "He's sitting in a chair opposite his old Headmaster, inwardly dying of laughter at one of the poorest uses of life-debts he has ever heard of."

Albus's eyes widened comically before he clenched them shut and rested his head in his hands. "Harry."

Nicholas was smiling. "Yes Albus?"

"What have you done with Nicholas?" A nearly broken old man asked.

Nicholas snickered and morphed back into his natural Harry Potter appearance. "That's actually a bit of a long story."

Albus opened his eyes and leaned back in his chair. "Well I've got all the time in the world and would love to hear it."

Harry began. "Well the story starts back in the fourteenth century. There was a muggleborn wizard who had been apprenticing in Alchemy to a master. When they discovered he was muggleborn he was dismissed from his apprenticeship for not being of pure blood. This angered him greatly, and decided he wasn't going to let them stop him from studying the art. So he created an alternate identity. He made him a pureblood wizard, and named him Nicholas Flamel. This way he could actually progress and get the respect as a wizard he deserved for his skill. Now for several decades Nicholas Flamel was a skilled and famous alchemist. He was also a well known extremely quick and powerful dueler, and he was respected as a warrior of the light."

Harry noted Albus was like a child absorbing in the story he was being told. Harry continued. "Now, as Nicholas got older, he realized the image of the man Nicholas Flamel was a lot stronger and more impressive than the man was as he had aged. So he hatched a plan. He would achieve the impossible in the field of alchemy: immortality. Of course, this was only the immortality of a made-up name, passed on from one generation's greatest warrior to another whenever it was needed. He found a cool looking geode and called it the Sorcerer's Stone. And then when a suitable warrior of the light came around, he passed the torch on. This way, the side of the light, has an immortal legend always willing to stand up for the righteous. And his mere existence is a deterrent to hostile activities."

“The story next picks up when you were a student at Hogwarts, and you had the same DADA teacher for your first six years.”

“Professor Thatcher” Albus said with a sort of childlike honesty.

“Westley Thatcher, who at the age of 34, lost his wife the summer after your sixth year. And then decided to take up the mantle and became the seventh Nicholas Flamel. A brilliant man. Ravenclaw to the bone. Not the most powerful of his age, but unparalleled in his studies. He was just right for a Nicholas Flamel who was better suited to studying, and left the leading and hero work to you.”

“So where is Professor Thatcher now?”

“He trained me for a year to be Nicholas Flamel, then he focused a lot on breaking down and understanding the Dementor Blood, and then when I graduated, he left on a whirlwind tour of all the island beach resorts in the world because he said he had some more wild oats to sow.” Harry finished with a sad smile. “He died about two months before Voldemort did.”

They sat in fond silence remembering the friend they both had.

Albus sat up. “Wait. You said he trained you for just a year. So did you teach yourself seventh year DADA?” Albus finished incredulously.

“Yeah, can you believe I was top in the class too? Though there might be a legitimate argument for favoritism there. And so now, you can see the DADA curse in fact has not been broken. So if you want me to teach next year, it’ll be Harry Potter teaching. If you need me again, it’ll be Nicholas Flamel. I’ll trade off as long as I can. I love that curse.”

Dumbledore just goggled at what this young man had done.

Harry shrugged his shoulders. “I rule.”

“How on earth did you stay sane in your seventh year?” Albus asked.

“Well, considering how much I was using my time turner, being Nicholas and Harry, not to mention Harry had as many as four simultaneous private tutoring sessions, in addition to working with Wesley, you need to realize seventh year was over three years long for me.” Harry said with a calm shrug.

Albus just stopped and would look at Harry. He would then shake his head in silence and look away. Then he would look back at Harry and repeat this process several times. Harry just sat there calmly giving the poor old man some time to collect himself.

“Harry, I’m speechless here. I’m sure as I start going over the past few years in my head I will find many instances where I made a complete fool of myself.”

“Well you are a bit barmy.”

“And you’re completely insane!” Albus stopped and shook his head. “You know. That’s enough for now. This may take a little time to process. But you said something about a memory charm?”

Harry smiled. “Ahh yes. I could explain it to you, but please just allow me to undo it, and you’ll have most of your questions answered right away.”

Albus relaxed his mental shields and maintained eye contact with the young man.

Harry went in, found the block Westley had made, and broke it carefully.

Albus blinked a bit and began to file through this new information. “Professor Thatcher asked me to be the next Nicholas Flamel?”

Harry nodded. “He’d only been Flamel for a couple decades. Would have been the shortest amount of time any one Nicholas Flamel had lasted. Instead he ended up staying for the longest.”

Albus looked perplexed. “What did I say that made him reject me?”

Harry shook his head. "It wasn't him rejecting you. He was able to determine from your answers to questions that you wished to make yourself great, and make the Dumbledore name one to be proud of. So, he knew you were a better leader, and more powerful and skilled at most practical magic than he was. That was why Flamel was a less newsworthy name during the rise of Grindelwald. And he knew he wouldn't be able to keep up with you during Voldemort's reign of terror."

Albus smiled thinking about his old DADA professor.

"He felt he had succeeded just by assisting you into making yourself the iconic leader and respected man you wished to be. He felt for a long time that you should be very proud. He was going to wait until after I graduated to approach me, but he sensed he wasn't going to live that much longer."

"But what about the Sorcerer's Stone and Voldemort in your first year?" Albus questioned.

"Just a pretty hunk of garnet. As firmly on the side of light as Flamel has always been, I'm surprised you would think he would allow such an item to be available to abuse from people like Voldemort. And he knew you well enough, to observe however you planned to test me. All the geezers I know try to dictate my life." Harry said with a shake of his head.

"So what all did he teach you? He was an excellent DADA professor for me. It didn't matter that my professor in seventh year was as bad as Lockhart. I was already past first year auror level by then."

"Well, I had the metamorph skills I needed to learn A.S.A.P., but one of the very first tools a Flamel needs is a darn good memory charm for when you screw up. Because you always will eventually say something wrong. Or someone will see something they shouldn't." Harry was shaking his head.

"Poor Dennis Creevey in my seventh year kept running into two of me, before and after some private lessons. I must have obliviated him twenty times that year."

Albus just chuckled. He wasn't sure at what point excessive memory charming of fellow students becomes acceptable but for some reason this didn't bother him in the slightest.

Harry continued, "And of course, my tutors' secrecy charms became necessary for far more obvious reasons now. Any time I got something I don't want to say, either Nicholas or Harry has me under spell and I cannot share."

Albus looked a bit frustrated at the chuckling young man.

"Of course you realize Nicholas Flamel is still going to lead the hunt for Harry Potter." Harry said with a mocking smirk.

Albus just groaned at how badly they all had been fooled. And then remembering the secrecy spells on him, they will continue to be fooled.

Albus smiled weakly. "Well since you've got me locked under the knowledge suppression, you realize you should tell me all about your findings on Dementor Blood."

Harry looked at his Headmaster considering. "Well I suppose it won't hurt."

Albus smiled and nodded eagerly.

Harry laughed at him picturing Dobby in his place. Finally Harry began, "It's going to be real big. Like piss off a lot of purebloods, big. For example, at the Ministry on my birthday I used a small potion bomb. It completely freezes in a stasis of time all magic. People dependent on magic can leech enough subconsciously to never be in danger. If your heart needs magic to pump, because it is so weak on its own, then the magic is there for that. But conscious or intended or even emotional bursts of magic are locked away. Of course if you use some of the explosive parts of the potion bomb, and mix it a different way, it becomes a completely different potion that counters the effects of the potion bomb, and you would be the only one capable of having magic within your area. If the bad guys learn that one, then

they can stay out wide in the open and easily protect themselves. That was what I was testing at the Ministry. I merely put a locking spell on the Fountain of Magical Brethren that required a parseltongue counter.”

“Another use for Dementor Blood is a huge step towards perhaps dropping the barrier on the secrecy between wizards and muggles. I tested it as a remote casting ability through a crystallized linked version of a split jewel. That was when it was an open communications device and I hit Moony on the nose with a snake? And silenced Tonks? Well, the crystal also has storage capabilities to keep it triggered by things like words.”

Dumbledore was amazed at the possibilities this could open up.

“Think of the rings, and imagine being able to hold the spell until some stimulus makes it react. You could combine it with muggle technology on things like motion detectors that cast stunners and lumos charms at detected motion. Or the security possibilities of charming a muggle handgun with stunners instead of bullets: complete stopping power that is essentially harmless.”

Harry got an evil grin. “And in case you haven’t caught on, with storage based on voice activation, I’ve managed to make self-spelling wands that muggles can just say the spell to use.” Harry made a face that was downright Slytherin. “Magic can officially go on sale.”

Albus was gobsmacked. This was going to change a lot. Maybe almost everything. There would be quite a few people upset at these discoveries. And if Harry Potter wasn’t powerful enough, he was the only person on the planet with access to Dementor Blood.

“Don’t worry. It may be a while before we reveal too much about Dementor Blood. We still have to explore a few of the darker avenues still. One of which allows communication with trapped souls.”

“What?” Albus asked.

“Yeah” Harry said. “Like let’s say Dementor Dave goes and kisses your friend Anne. Now, if you can get Dementor Dave’s blood, you

can use it in a potion to communicate with all the souls that Dementor Dave has trapped by 'kissing.' Naturally that includes maintaining ongoing communication with your friend Anne. I'm pretty sure there are questionable ways to extract something like a portrait imprint after they've been kissed. And it looks like there's a real possibility it could also completely recall a person's soul into their body if it's still alive, or another body even. But of course that will be the evil sacrificial black magic or some such rot." Harry was saying with a sarcastic voice. He continued with a wince and said "I'm thinking that's a direction I'm only going to explore in theory and hopefully never see it used in practice."

In some ways Albus was quite glad he wasn't in Harry's position. This is a great sort of problem for someone else to have. Of course it is also one of the biggest discoveries in who knows how long. "There are a great many things I would wish to further discuss with you, but I think I need to lay down for a bit. We are definitely going to have some more conversations on this, seeing as I won't be able to talk about it with anyone else."

Harry decided to be a nice guy and said, "I'm in the process of sharing this all with Hermione. You'll be able to talk freely with her, if you like."

Albus nodded. "That would be extremely helpful."

Harry morphed back into Professor Nicholas Flamel. "You know it's kind of funny, that my life is so twisted that I find pretending to be an immortal, powerful legend as a way to escape and act more normal."

Albus smirked and said, "I think with you around Harry, we will all live in interesting times."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

“Ennervate” said Nicholas.

“Urgh.” Hermione mumbled as she slowly ventured into the world of the conscious.

“How are you feeling, Hermy?” Nicholas asked.

Hermione’s eyes snapped open at the Grawp-christened nickname. She groaned and closed her eyes back up. “I hate you, Harry Potter.”

Nicholas morphed back into his natural form of Harry Potter. “No you don’t sugar-britches. You love me.”

“Oh Harry,” was all she said before hugging her friend violently. She clung onto her annoying best friend and was having a bit of an emotional episode. “You do realize I am going to get revenge on you.”

“I know, Herms, I know. But I wanted to make certain that I deserved any and all said revenge.” A chuckling Harry replied.

Hermione smacked her friend in the head and pushed away.

She collected herself into her more focused, studious mindset. “So Nicholas Flamel is just a name like Dread Pirate Roberts? Passed down and only remaining useful for as long as the secret is kept?”

Harry nodded.

Hermione’s eyes widened. “You taught us seventh year!”

Harry snickered.

“That’s why you like the DADA curse so much! It really did make you the man you are today.”

Harry gave Hermione a small quiet golf clap.

“Oh Harry. You know, it kinda ruins the point when Superman’s alter-ego is Batman.”

Harry shrugged. “Enh. It’s still a place to hide, and no one would suspect it.”

“And the Sorcerer’s Stone?”

“Was a cool looking rock that makes the name, Nicholas Flamel, seem much more impressive.”

Hermione shook her head and sighed. “You just like making all my books wrong, don’t you?”

Harry shrugged. “I didn’t write them.” He paused and thought for a second. “Well, not all of them.”

Hermione huffed. “Oh geez. I can’t believe I’m saying this, but you’ve been rightfully so smug and cheeky. Leading the search for yourself.” She shook her frustrated head. “Hiding in plain sight in the least likely spot. So why are you telling me now?”

“Hermie,” Harry was trying to see if she would even react to the numerous smarmy nicknames, “you have got to look at it from my perspective. Can you imagine how funny it is, from my point of view? You, who must know everything, trying to figure out the mystery of ‘Where in the world is Harry Potter?’”

Hermione just groaned.

“Now imagine how much fun it’s going to be for you to know, and be unable to tell anyone else.”

Hermione whimpered.

“You know, buttercup, you’d make a great Perenelle Flamel.”

Hermione’s head snapped up and her eyes widened in shock.

Harry burst out laughing. "I'm just kidding! Slow down. Your reaction was priceless. Oh man this is going to be fun."

Hermione went back to whimpering.

Harry put on a very serious face. "Besides, if we're really going to figure out where Harry is hiding we need to be open and honest with each other."

Hermione scowled a bit, cast a Sonorus on herself, and managed to yell out "Ngh!"

Harry just laughed. "You really need to work on your keeping secrets there. I warned you this was a big one, and required a much more stringent secrecy spell."

Hermione went back into defense mode. "All those secrecy spells preventing Nicholas from talking about Harry! Even all the spells at the Order meeting before school started! You were just making it all up as you went, weren't you?"

Harry really was trying not to snicker and smile too much, but it was not easy. Every indignant face Hermione made, or frustrated sigh was another small battle won in Harry's mind.

"I'm going to go crazy unable to whine and moan about you, aren't I?"

Harry smiled and felt a bit of pity for her. "Well, it appears Fate doesn't want you to snap just yet, as while you were unconscious, Albus called in a life-debt 'Nicholas Flamel' owed him. He's under the same secrecy spell you are, and he knows just about everything too."

"Just about everything?" Hermione asked.

Harry smiled. "Well, I'm not about to give away all my secrets, now am I?" Harry morphed his appearance into a different one. "Where would the fun be in that?"

Hermione gasped. "You're my geek friend!"

Harry morphed back. "Are you sure about that? I might just know Corey and have helped him on the program."

Hermione shook her head. "No. You are..." She sighed and thought about it and realized she wasn't sure. "This is absolutely craptacular."

Harry disagreed but restrained himself from pointing that out to Hermione.

"So, you're a Snorkack food delivery guy, eh?" Hermione said with a blush.

Harry just snickered and smiled, doing his best to give nothing away.

"And you like to dress up as a pirate on Halloween?"

Harry looked surprised. "A pirate? What do you mean?"

Hermione went pale for a second before realizing who she was talking to. "You were the pirates! Admit it!"

Harry looked as innocent as he ever had. "Hermione, I have no idea what you're talking about."

Hermione broke down into tears. "Harry!" She sniffled out, "I just can't take this. You have to stop lying to me." She put her head down in her arms and just sobbed. "It's too much. Too many lies. Too many deceptions."

Harry rolled his eyes. "Too much over-acting. I know you better than anyone Herms."

She snapped her tear-free face back up. "Gods above, I hate you."

"You would be so utterly bored without me." A smug Harry retorted. It was the end of the year staff meeting. This evening was the leaving feast, and tomorrow the Hogwarts Express would be taking all the young impressionable minds back to London for the rest of summer.

Albus addressed all of his colleagues. "This has been another wonderful, quiet, Dark Lord-free year."

Severus butted in. "Albus, don't tempt fate and say things like that."

"Thank you Severus. We have survived the fighting spirit of a Marauder, and I daresay I think we're past the worst of that storm."

"Fate, Albus, fay-ate."

Albus snapped at the greasy man. "You do realize, there is now another trained Potions professor and potential Head of Slytherin House among the faculty, don't you?"

Severus wisely shut up, but Draco puffed himself up proudly. An unexpected burst of pleasure ran through the blonde ponce and he let out an undignified shriek and briefly shivered a spasm.

Albus continued. "As I was saying, we are going to be saying 'Goodbye' to Pomona Sprout, who has taught Herbology for several decades, and headed the Hufflepuff House for almost as long. We thank you for your service and time and wish you the best. Replacing her as Herbology professor will be Neville Longbottom."

Severus closed his eyes and bit his tongue to keep from saying anything. The soothing sensations his phoenix mark was sending only added to his stress.

"We are also going to be bidding adieu to Professor Flamel again." A number of people turned their heads, unaware of that fact.

"He apparently has too much respect for the mumbo-jumbo about a DADA curse." Albus said with a frown. "But he did make an interesting suggestion for a replacement." Albus looked around at the attentive faces. "He recommended tracking down the Light Lord Potter and guilting him into taking the position."

Severus opposed. "Albus, that horrible little boy cannot possibly teach properly."

Nicholas just snickered.

Albus looked at his Potions professor. "Really Severus? Because I found he taught me a lot," Albus raised a challenging eyebrow, "about myself."

Draco started snickering and was rewarded with a cuff in the head from Severus.

Tonks looked hopeful. "You think we will be able to find him? And trick him into teaching?"

Nicholas suggested. "I'm not sure 'tricking' him is the best way to do it, but don't worry about finding him. I intend to dedicate my summer to discovering all I can about that cheeky bugger and forcing him into honoring his duty to this school."

Tonks smiled. "Man, what would we do without you, Nicholas?"

Albus and Hermione had identical winces, though Hermione's was accompanied with a loud "urg."

Tonks was nodding. "We wouldn't even have a chance of getting Harry without you."

Nicholas smiled. "I like to think, I do what I can."

Hermione was getting really dizzy now and having trouble thinking straight.

Tonks smirked and added, "If you can find Harry and get him into the DADA position, I'll even take another year of sabbatical and stay on in the Caretaker position."

Albus smiled and leaned forward. "I think I will try and hold you to that, Miss Tonks."

Tonks turned to Minerva and asked, "Harry's still single, right?"

Minerva looked stern and replied. "He'd have to be. You cannot be that immature and in a relationship. Merlin help us all when the beast reproduces."

A few chuckles around the room, probably loudest from Albus and Hermione, were accompanied by a slight frown on Nicholas's face.

A concerned Draco asked, "Are we sure we want to be responsible for officially exposing students to this?"

More chuckles continued, though Nicholas's may have been a bit hollow.

Albus added, "I think he may be more capable at teaching than many of you are giving him credit for."

Any further conversation was interrupted when a battered and beaten Kingsley Shacklebolt burst into the staff room. "Albus! There's an attack!"

Albus jumped to his feet and rushed over to the injured auror. "What has happened?"

Kingsley's breathing relaxed a bit. "At the Ministry. Someone calling herself The Dark Lady FoxFire. Just appeared in the atrium with at least 40 followers." He turned his head and coughed a little blood.

"They killed the guards and watchman there, and sealed the building shut. They're going to fight their way through all the offices and take it over. The first wave of aurors was beaten back and locked into a separate section."

"We're being picked off through sheer numbers, but there are a few places holding them back." He wheezed out.

Albus took control of the situation. "I will alert the Order. We will all try to hurry there and help out in every way we can. Nicholas!"

"Yes, Albus?"

“Do you have any idea where Harry Potter is? He would really help us out in this.” Albus pleaded.

Nicholas nodded. “I have a general idea.” Nicholas cast a Sonorus at his throat. His voice bellowed throughout the whole castle. “I know you’re in here you cheeky bugger! Stop spying on the Prefect’s bathroom.” He paused. “Not you, Myrtle.”

Several teen girls were covering themselves and putting their wands down innocently in the aforementioned bathroom.

“You know who I’m talking to. The boss just called. Break is over. Time for you to get back to work.”

Nicholas canceled the Sonorus charm and smiled to his amused colleagues. Albus was goggling at the pretentious old man. He ordered Minerva to keep an eye on the school, and gave all the immediate Order members instructions. He neglected to give Nicholas any orders, hesitant on assuming anything about him.

Nicholas offered. “I’ll help Minerva keep an eye on things here, and make sure the attack isn’t a distraction.”

Albus smiled and nodded. “Thank you Nicholas.” A couple members of the Order used their Order portkeys to go to Headquarters and spread the word. Albus made a portkey to the Ministry and Tonks, Hermione, and Severus all grabbed on for the trip.

They arrived to see a cloaked figure just tearing through the dozen or so masked dark wizards that seemed to be guarding the atrium.

A familiar voice yelled out. “I wondered when you would get here.”

Hermione tried to say ‘Bloody time-turner!’ but only managed to say “ngh” and give herself a headache.

The cloaked figure finished knocking the last random henchmen unconscious and said. “I think they’re holed up on the fourth floor.”

The Order members hurried after the still hidden cloaked figure. When they arrived up at the main hall of the fourth floor, they realized the initial assessment of 40 followers was on the low side. Or else they had at least 25 Ministry insiders, because there were at least 50 masked wizards surrounding and defending a woman who was obviously the Dark Lady FoxFire.

She was floating in air and magic was just crackling, circling and arcing around her. She apparently had some pretty polished mage sensing skill as she turned her attention straight to the stairwell and exclaimed, "You!"

She had a pair of large cats pacing protectively around her. On closer inspection, the Order gasped as they recognized them as nundus.

Everyone fighting paused and turned their attention towards the stairwell.

The Dark Lady narrowed her eyes and hissed out, "Potter!"

Everyone in the room knew very well who it was, taking off his cloak, and handing it to Hermione.

Hermione took the offered cloak and said, "You know you're out in the open officially now."

Harry shrugged and said, "It's been a pretty slow year for me actually."

Hermione snorted at her incorrigible friend.

The Dark Lady FoxFire sent a mental call out her to nundu protectors and yelled, "Attack!"

The two large cats roared out battle cries and charged towards Harry.

Harry winked at the Order members standing behind him, and turned and sprinted right towards the raging nundus. He leapt and in mid-air transformed into a much larger nundu, and smacked both of the smaller ones, viciously on the nose like a mother scolding her

children. Both cats whimpered and laid down hiding their heads in shame.

The giant nundu that was Harry Potter continued his charge and tackled the frightened Dark Lady FoxFire. He had both of her arms pinned down to the ground and his jaw was clenched softly around her throat.

The Dark Lady gulped audibly and quietly asked, "Where've you been hiding?"

..oo00 THE END 00oo..

Author's Note: This was where I envisioned my story ending. And yes, I chose to name the Dark Lady after Lady FoxFire, who was the first reviewer after only Chapter 3, and before Nicholas had even shown up, to ask if Flamel was Harry. Maybe a bit more of a lucky guess than deductive reasoning at the point, but 'Cheers' nonetheless.

Be sure to check out the sequel to this story called "The Untitled Cheekquel Project." You can reach it at story id 2477165 or from my userpage.